

## PublicHealth

Suicide is Preventable. Just Ask. Make it OK for you, your sons and grandsons to talk about depression and suicide.  
For more information on the project and links to local support go to [www.torbayculture.org/justask](http://www.torbayculture.org/justask)



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



Time is the thing  
that's needed.

And men will  
eventually open  
up to each other.

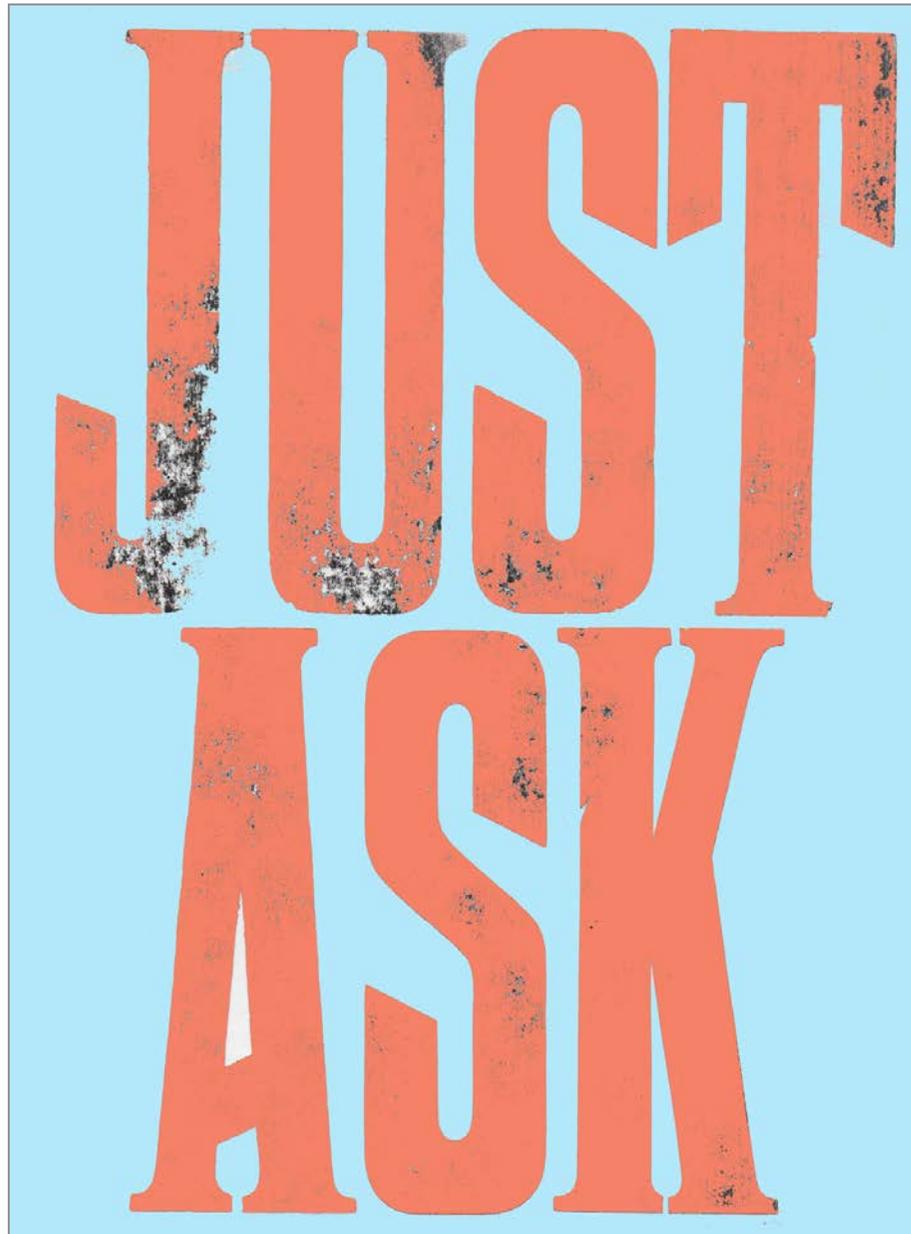


# JUST ASK

**MEN'S SUICIDE PREVENTION  
PROJECT**

**EVALUATION REPORT**

**TORBAY CULTURE BOARD WITH  
TORBAY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEALTH TEAM**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of the participants who took time to share their thoughts on film and give their invaluable feedback over this project. We also extend thanks to all those who supported the project including Dave Brazier, Tom Chapman, Paul Gooding, James Hoskins, Sean McTiernan, Joseph Elford, all at Endeavour House, Torquay Boxing Club, Growing for Life, In the Same Boat, Foxhole Community Centre, Torbay Community Development Trust and Torbay's Fire & Rescue Service. Many other individuals and organisations continue to add to the network of support for suicide prevention across Torbay,

## PROJECT TEAM

**Simon Ripley**, artist printmaker and Director of Double Elephant Print Workshop.

**Joshua Gaunt**, artist working in film, animation and combined arts.

**Chukumeka Maxwell**, social worker, mental health and wellbeing, and ASIST trainer.

**Nathalie Palin**, project manager and internal evaluator.

**Lisa Gardiner**, Wonder Associates, Social media campaign lead.

**Professor Christabel Owens** external evaluation advisor specialising in the study of suicide and self-harming behaviour,, Exeter University.

**Gerry Cadogan** is Public Health Principal for Torbay Council.

**Kate Farmery**, Executive Director of Torbay Culture Board

**Kevin Dixon**, Chair of Healthwatch Torbay. Steering Group member.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Art helps people to express experiences that are too difficult to put into words. Despite this, and the fact that society invests substantial funds in both sectors, there is little real understanding and acceptance from health professionals of the benefits of creative efforts on moods and emotions in addition to physiological parameters. In fact, art complements the biomedical view by focusing on the holistic nature of the person rather than just the illness (*Am J Public Health, 2010*). The relationship is also an important area for public health investigation.

'Just Ask ' is a project that has affected everyone who became engaged in it. It elicited information about the myths of engagement, such as 'hard to reach' groups. The artists became the agents of change by regularly visiting the men in their usual settings. It was important that they were not mental health professionals, so that men spoke without fear as they were respected as a person and not a client. In line with national research and our local Torbay suicide audits, where 75% of people who took their life had not been in contact with the mental health services, there were only 7% of men in this project who were in contact with formal services. Yet the level of loneliness, relationship breakdown and resultant inability to connect with people was also observed by our artists, again reflecting the key elements of the suicide audit.

As in all research which takes us into uncertain territory, the need for flexibility, and to respond to emerging wishes was essential. The artists had an original plan which had been developed with the commissioners, and was therefore prescriptive and restrictive. Consequently, as they were dealing with people rather than numbers, the opportunity to use differing techniques such as films and posters expanded the project repertoire.

Evaluation in health and social care is a developing process, and evaluation in arts- based work is more established. But here we were dealing with a group of people that were not ill. Consequently, use of tools such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Scale, frequently known as the Happiness Scale, proved unhelpful and even patronising. A Logic Model approach was used which was helpful for the commissioners to frame their approach, but was also restrictive.

Community feedback was required. The response from those workers involved in the project, many of whom volunteered from local agencies, *in addition to* the response of the participating men and women, was intense and emotive. We learnt what worked (the flexibility, informality, opportunity) and what didn't (fixed appointments, medicalisation). The social media response, providing an opportunity for the Torbay community to become engaged, linked the project with other men's projects that were part of the Collective Men's Mental Health work, such as the Lions Barber Collective.

As with other short-term projects, the opportunity to develop this further was stalled by funding coming to an end. Sustainability was addressed by the men engaging with other projects. There is a concern about the inevitability of projects ceasing as the groups of men were beginning to use their new skills.

Gerry Cadogan, Public Health Principal, Torbay Council

# JUST ASK

## INTRODUCTION

Through this project, Torbay Culture Board and Torbay Council's Public Health Team set out to change the way that people think about emotional wellbeing and to remove the stigma around depression and suicide. Suicide audits undertaken by Public Health Torbay since 2009 indicated a high male suicide rate – and reflected national trends in that 75% of people who took their lives had never been seen by the mental health services, but may have accessed their GP. Despite the best efforts of GPs, mental health and other services, the suicide rate in Torbay remains high. With new partnerships emerging across Arts and Health in Torbay, it was time to look at alternative methods to tackle this issue. Initial proposals were to reach and work with men creatively in a group setting in order to support them to: -

- Improve their own mental health
- Get a better understanding of the root causes of their health issues
- Make choices in their lives that divert them from the path of suicide at an early stage.

Aims were refined in consultation with health and cultural advisors, men who had been affected by suicide, artists and an external evaluator. Using creativity and conversation to benefit participants, their family, friends and wider community, the project aimed to: -

- **find out why men find it so difficult to ask for help when they need support for their emotional health and;**
- **help men in Torbay to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and to raise their self-esteem so that they could ask for help.**

Creative practitioners Simon Ripley and Josh Gaunt worked with groups of local men to develop stories about their lives and to illustrate them through film and print-making. As well as providing an artistic focus for those taking part, the sessions aimed to create an environment in which men could talk about emotional and health issues. With this emphasis on breaking the silence around suicide and creating room to talk about difficult issues, *Just Ask* became the title of the project.

In spring and summer of 2016, Simon and Josh ran a series of creative workshops and visited groups of men in a range of Torbay locations, including a men's shelter, a boxing club, a number of fire stations, a community garden, a carpentry workshop, a barber's shop and a pub. Their outputs include a series of short films capturing the men's experiences and a set of wood-cut print beer mats, designed by participants to encourage other men to *Just Ask* for help if they need it.

The project approach was refined and altered as it progressed. Short films were shared through social media campaigns, and other resources created (beer mats, posters) for display in GP surgeries, pubs and other key venues. This additional activity aimed to reach a broader range of men locally, and to encourage a more public, user-generated conversation about mental health, suicide and depression. Through encouraging a more public conversation, this activity aimed to build a more robust web of support across Torbay, strengthening links between individual support initiatives for men locally.

## EVALUATION PROCESS

*Just Ask* used two complementary models of arts evaluation to quantify the impact of the project. Success criteria established at the outset were derived in consultation with a steering group, including local men directly affected by suicide and depression, health & arts professionals.

1: Evaluation Toolkit, based on the Evaluation Toolkit for the voluntary and community sector arts in Northern Ireland in 2004.

2: Outcomes-based Process Evaluation, providing the framework for the Toolkit, developed in partnership with Dr Christabel Owens of Exeter University.

This combined approach was developed to ensure that learning from the pilot was transferable, and that activity could be refined into the future. The emphasis was on the social impact of activities – outcomes for participants involved and outcomes of sharing the work with the broader community.

*“Despite the best effort of GPs, mental health and other services, we haven’t been able to reduce the suicide rate in Torbay. The majority of people, particularly men, who take their own life have never used mental health services and may not have talked to their GP – or anyone else – about their problems. We have to look at alternative methods and this project is an innovative and creative way to tackle the problem.”*

Gerry Cadogan, Public Health Principal, Torbay Council



## AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF 'JUST ASK'

### AIMS

1. To find out why men find it so difficult to ask for help when they need support for their emotional health;
2. To help men in Torbay to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and to raise their self-esteem so that they could ask for help.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To use creative participatory activities to engage men and encourage them to discuss their issues and concerns;
2. To share new creative materials to increase awareness and open up the public conversation around depression and suicide;
3. To positively impact on other men and the wider community by creating dialogue and using new creative material to reduce stigma around depression and suicide.

### ANTICIPATED CREATIVE/MATERIAL OUTPUTS (Products)

- Creative work for participants to take home and keep
- Artwork to share or exhibit
- Public health messages co-produced with participants sharing their journeys
- Design & print materials for use in public or everyday contexts (e.g. beer mats)
- Films with messaging about men/mental health for use online and/or in GP surgeries.

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- Engagement with individual men, providing a supportive environment to talk about mental health, emotional, financial, social and other pressures (particularly in repeat sessions with a stable group);
- Establish a strong advocacy group of men to champion future work and develop sustainable suicide prevention networks work in Torbay;
- Reach out to a broader public at creative taster sessions to spread the word about men and mental health through taster sessions (e.g. building on Double-Elephant's 'Conversation Station' delivery model).

### ARTICULATING LONGER TERM ASPIRATIONS

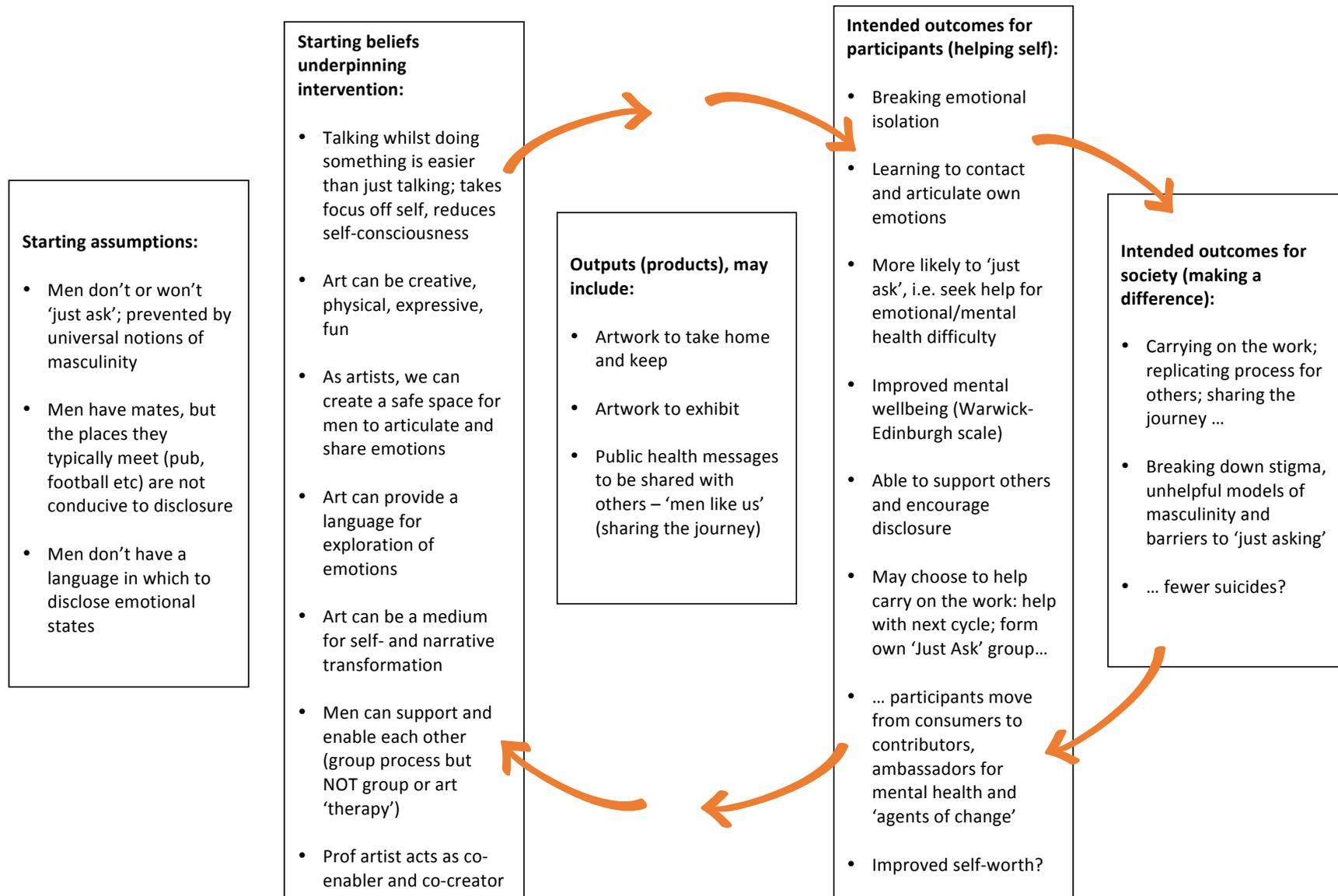
At the outset, members of the steering group expressed their aspirations for addressing issues around suicide and depression. Whilst these are long-term goals, they indicate the project's intentions to act as a springboard towards more normalised, visible and integrated support for those experiencing depression or suicide ideation.

- *"Every Cultural Provider should have a Suicide Prevention Champion"*
- *"We need to help the grassroots movements to link up – a strong web of people talking to each other."*
- *"For men to feel there is somewhere they can go to talk"*
- *"By the time my son is a man, I'd like it to be normal for men to discuss their mental health. So that men don't feel it is 'unmanly' to discuss suicide and mental health issues".*

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

OBJECTIVES	OUTCOMES	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
<p>Over the life of the project: To use creative participatory activities (print and film) to engage men and encourage them to discuss their issues and concerns.</p>	<p><b>Intended outcomes for participants (helping self)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breaking emotional isolation</li> <li>▪ Learning to contact and articulate own emotions</li> <li>▪ More likely to 'just ask' i.e. seek help for emotional/mental health difficulties</li> <li>▪ Improved mental wellbeing</li> <li>▪ Able to support others and encourage disclosure</li> <li>▪ May choose to help carry on the work ; help with next cycle e.g. form own 'Just Ask' group for future</li> <li>▪ From costumer to contributors – ambassadors for mental health and 'agents of change'</li> <li>▪ Improved self worth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants self-report feeling less isolated.</li> <li>▪ Artists and supporting staff report improvement in individuals ability to open up and articulate emotions.</li> <li>▪ Participants seek contact through repeat attendance at sessions.</li> <li>▪ Participants have improved mental wellbeing over life of the pilot (Warwick-Edinburgh scale).</li> <li>▪ Number of men choose to continue the work (artistic and/or suicide prevent focus) beyond life of the pilot.</li> <li>▪ Participants act as ambassadors for suicide prevention.</li> <li>▪ Motivation and increased self-esteem is reported by participants and witnessed by artists/staff.</li> </ul>
<p>Over the life of the project: To share new creative materials to increase awareness and open up the public conversation around depression and suicide.</p> <p>Beyond the life of the project: To positively impact on other men and the wider community by creating dialogue and using new creative material to reduce stigma around depression and suicide.</p>	<p><b>Intended outcomes for society (making a difference)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Carry on the work: replicating the process for others; sharing the journey</li> <li>▪ Breaking down stigma, unhelpful models of masculinity and barriers to 'just asking'</li> <li>▪ Fewer suicides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feedback from broader public shows impact of increased awareness and reach – qualitative and quantitative feedback and reach data (exhibitions or online)</li> </ul>

**Just Ask: Initial provisional logic model based on participatory arts engagement approach**



## EVIDENCE: QUANTITATIVE

### Data collected and methods used:

Numbers of men participating in the project were recorded at each session, with estimated ages and levels of need. The nature of each setting and initial caution by potential participants meant that formal recording of name, age and needs was not carried out. At the outset, it was intended that pre- and post- participation Warwick-Edinburgh scale questionnaires would measure impact on wellbeing for individuals participating. As soon as taster workshops began, it became evident that questionnaires at the start of the project activities would act as an additional barrier to engagement for those men who tentatively came forward to participate. The artists recorded the numbers of participants and others engaged at each session, noted approximate ages, nature of engagement and need based on informal conversations with each.

### Participation

Between March and April 2016, the two artists delivered 12 creative ‘taster’ sessions at eleven sites across Torquay and Paignton, in areas where suicide rates in Torbay are the highest. They set up mobile printmaking equipment in a variety of spaces including fire stations, shopping centres, pubs, a hostels and support centres – engaging men through practical creative activities and informal conversations to explore depression, anxiety and suicide. From May to July, 12 more extended sessions were delivered at three key sites in Torquay and Paignton, meeting with those engaged over several sessions. Additional ‘interviews’ were recorded at specific venues including a boxing club, woodworking shop, pub and community allotment.

Through the 24 sessions, 16 participants (15 male, 1 female) engaged in creative activities, filming and conversations on the subject of suicide. Numbers of people attending the sessions varied greatly – from 11 people (at a session in a local pub) to 2 (in a men’s hostel). 65 instances of participation were recorded overall, with a small number of men attending repeat sessions through May to July. Across all of the sessions, an additional 65 men were involved in informal conversations, raising awareness on mental health issues and suicide prevention, but did not want to participate in creative activities or in-depth interviews. An estimated 7% of those involved were engaging with mental health support over the period of session delivery. The ages of men involved correlated with the venues used – at the boxing club, the majority were aged 18-35; at Street Pastors, majority aged over 50; at the Barber’s shop, majority aged 17-35; at the Hostel, aged 30-40; at Endeavour House and In the Same Boat, over 40 years. Participating men based locally to each of the settings were involved in activities in that setting specifically – only one of the participants travelled to multiple settings over the course of the project.

### Social Media Engagement

Between 13 March and 4 April 2017, a social media campaign extended the reach of the project, to widen awareness with a focus on primary audiences (men 18-35 yrs and 48yrs+) and secondary audiences (partners, friends & family).

People reached:	103,451
Post views:	43,755
Post shares:	621
Post reactions:	407
Total reactions:	1,028

## EVIDENCE: QUALITATIVE

Feedback and reflections were collected from participants, artists, project manager, communications and social media leads and steering group members through:

- In-depth interviews and one-to-one audio-recordings
- Creative participatory techniques
- Observation
- Written diaries (from artists and support workers)
- Online exhibition of work made (prints and films)
- Feedback and data-collection of reach through social media campaigns
- Interviews and small group discussions with partners and stakeholders
- Initial logic model developed with Dr. Christabel Owens
- Correspondence and views of the steering group, project manager and artists

Process documentation (photography/video) was not used for the purposes of the project.

In early discussions, it was agreed that anonymity was of ultimate importance and that participants would feel more relaxed and able to open up if there was no recording or image-taking. Instead, a mental health support worker and a volunteer participant-documenter were recruited to the team, to provide additional recording and input for individual participants. To ensure an appropriate balance of project staff to participants, not all team members attended every delivery session.

*“Despite being keen to get involved, several men clearly feel suspicious of the project. Its as if they are worried about being ‘used’.”* [Josh Gaunt, artist reflection]

## REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS

### Recruiting & Engaging with Participants

A key objective of the project had been to try to reach men who were not already getting support from mental health services or their GP. This itself is a significant challenge. Those who do not self-identify as needing support are unlikely to seek out services or necessarily engage with a project such as this. Through ‘taster sessions’ the artists created opportunities for people to ‘make’, talk and find out more – creating mono- and relief- prints, drawings, and through informal conversations and feedback. In public spaces in particular, many were dubious about the intentions of the project. Some were openly hostile.

*“there is a clear need to be able to ‘hold’ one-to-one contact with individuals. By initiating the conversation around suicide, all those with any direct or indirect experience show signs of upset.”* [Simon Ripley, artist]

The artists identified that they needed to ‘step back’ and change direction if they were to reach out to men and make a difference. The emphasis of the project shifted - the question become not “How to have sustained deep engagement with men?”, but “How to engage men full stop?”. Making the decision to attend a support group specifically for men who are feeling depressed or anxious takes drive and commitment to begin with. There are a number of groups locally that provide more open-access support, and these are more likely to attract men who do not have serious mental health issues. The artists refocused activity around established groups of men, using recorded interviews as a framework for discussions, with printmaking to design awareness-raising material as a complimentary activity.

## Print and Film

Using Printmaking and Film, *Just Ask* was originally framed as a developmental project, starting with outreach sessions to engage with men in public spaces, intended as an introductory vehicle to a series of repeat weekly sessions with a more established group.

As evidenced through longer-term support groups, print can be an effective medium for in depth process-based work. Through focusing on the process of ‘making’, the pressure of talking is reduced, making it easier for people to open up. But, the commitment of participants to spend time in a quiet room with the necessary resources comes about when people already have a connection, even in a small way, and is more impactful if they attend repeat sessions.

*“Before, he rejected the idea of making art himself. But this time he got involved and made letters for his animation ‘Light, Life, Love’. Each time we meet, he seems more prepared to get involved.”* [Observation, Josh Gaunt]

One-off sessions in outreach settings don’t work in the same way. And it is difficult to get people to stop and make work in a medium that they don’t feel confident about.

*“He was frustrated at not being taught [to draw] properly beforehand. He’s getting into art now. He made a print of the flats he hates - a source of frustration for him.”* [Observation, Josh Gaunt]

In outreach contexts, film (and audio) was a more accepted medium. This was, in part, because it was about conversation. Not everyone feels they can draw, but most feel like they can talk to some degree – even if they find it difficult to talk emotionally. Quite a few

people were reticent to talk in a group, particularly in more public spaces. But, when presented with a microphone in an ‘interview’ situation, people opened up. It was as if the microphone gave them permission to talk, whereby it had a directed purpose. It wasn’t viewed as talking for its own sake, and it was a singular opportunity to be heard. Numerous people (men and women) gave very in depth testimonies that were emotionally charged for them as participants (and for the artists as witnesses too).

Both artists commented that it was a very emotional process to go through, and that even with one-to-one conversations where they could provide a great deal of support, they were mindful about how participants would feel afterwards. This duty of care for those sharing their stories had been identified early in the project with Dr. Christabel Owens, highlighting the need to provide boundaries for participants not to ‘over-share’, so that they could reflect on their experiences, but were not left feeling exposed.

*“He was extremely apprehensive about what it would do emotionally. It brought up some raw emotions. The positive and negative effects of bringing up these feelings with people has come up several times. It underlines how vulnerable the process is.”* [Observation, Simon Ripley]

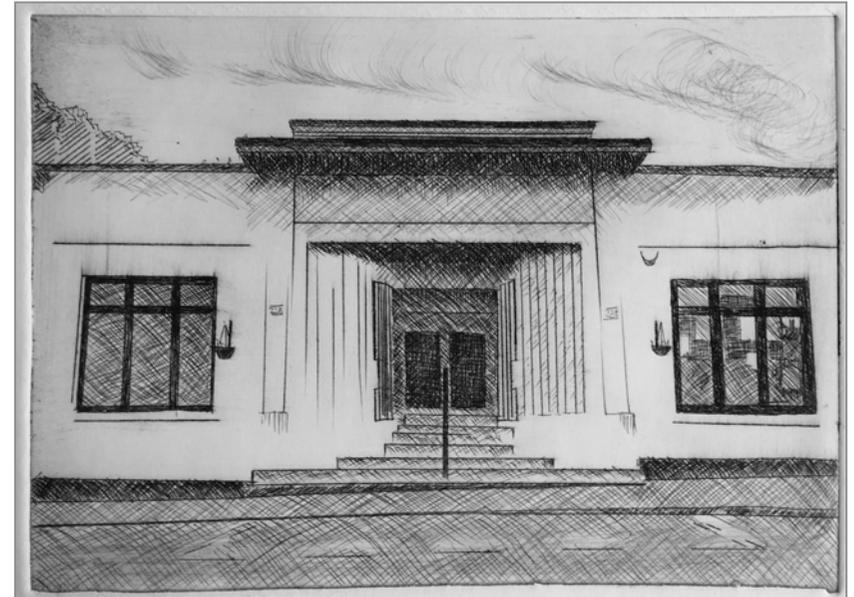
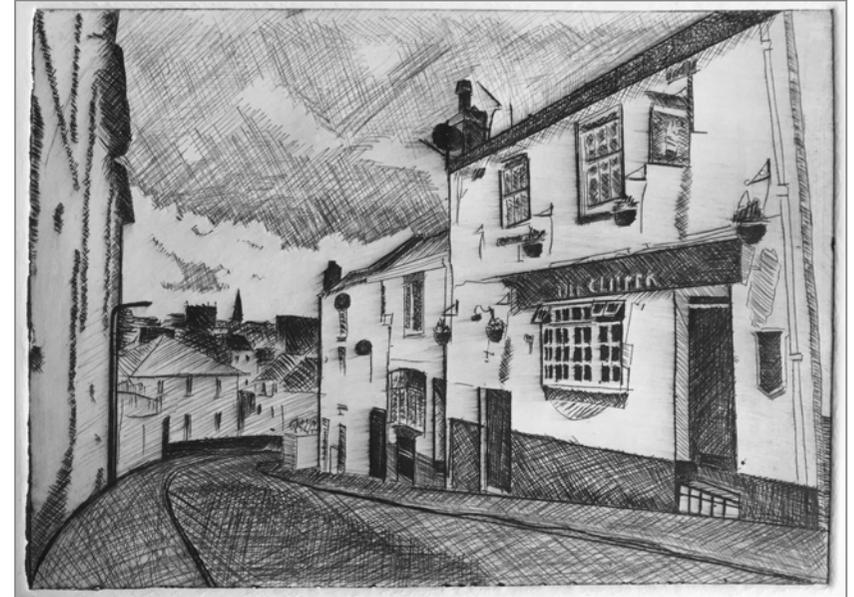
Artist Simon Ripley reflected that the project’s original intention to work with groups of 8 men in a workshop situation might not have provided a sufficient level of support. This brings up two questions. Firstly, would print-based work, engaging men in the making process, have resulted in more gentle sharing of time and thoughts, rather than the testimonies captured through the film interviews? Secondly, given that the primary target group were men who did not self-identify as being at risk, would they have been more able to manage group discussion than those who did engage, a number of whom were already had multiple and complex needs?

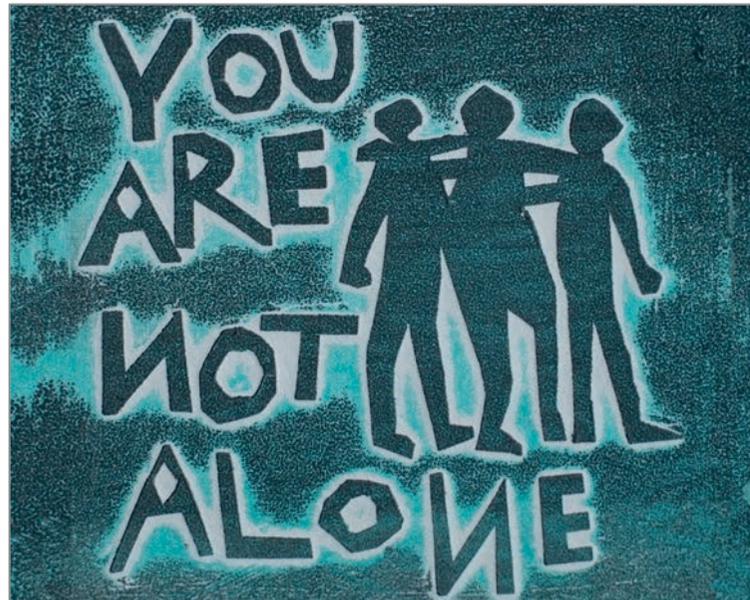
## Appropriate Spaces

This project also brought up questions about open and closed spaces. Reaching out to people who are not actively seeking help requires going out to everyday places that are not 'support settings'. These are open, democratic spaces, where anyone might wonder in – a pub, hostel or sports centre. But, they are by their nature, noisy and disconnected. They do not provide a 'holding space' for quiet conversations and can't easily accommodate facilities for creative workshop activities.

For some, it became a case of creating opportunities for conversation, and then finding quiet room away from initial point of entry once people felt able to commit. Others were happy to use the informality of the sessions for conversation, but didn't want to commit to the creative process just yet. Artists and participants developed trust over time, but the process was slow and tentative. With a regular 'open session' that ran each week in a cycle of locations across Torbay, both artists felt that greater involvement could be achieved over time.

*"With familiar faces from our previous visit, most got engaged in the making and a quiet buzz started in the pub, supported by a local community builder who has been terrific support."* [Reflection, Simon Ripley]





## SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The Just Ask social media campaign evolved later in the project, as a way of reaching a wide audience with the films created. A sub-set of objectives focused on disseminating to targeted local audiences to:

- Widen awareness and reach of the Just Ask message to audiences across Torbay
- Focus on primary audiences (men 18-35 yrs & 48yrs+) and secondary audiences (partners, friends & family)
- Increase the reach and views of the film clips
- Collate comments/responses to the film and Just Ask messages
- Distribute posters for digital views/shares and downloads to use in local communities
- Direct audiences to a micro-site of pages with information on Torbay Culture website

Facebook provided the best platform to reach local audiences online. It has the largest local audience out of all social media platforms available, and is a daily fixture in people's lives. A dedicated Just Ask Facebook page would have required constant input to interact and respond to Facebook audiences, including the likelihood that people in need might use it as a route to seek help - a resource that for these reasons would need to be available 24/7. Instead the approach was to piggyback on existing high volume pages and key influencers to spread messages to an already active Torbay community. The primary page resource was Spotted Torquay with further influence via Tom Chapman / The Lions Barber Collective. From 13 March to the 4 April 2016 a series of 8 posts which combined copy, the actual film clips and quote-based videos shot by Wonder Associates in Torbay – these clips were designed to capture Facebook users attention when viewed in silent or sound mode.

## Social Media Results

Campaign live:	13 March – 4 April 2017		
People reached:	103,451		
Post views:	43,755	Post shares:	621
Post reactions:	407	Total reactions:	1,028

The campaign achieved a wide reach into the local community, generating discussion and support. The 8 posts reached over 100,000 local people (i.e. they saw the posts) with 43,000 engaging with content (i.e. actively viewing the posts). The posts that performed strongest were highly place specific, had more depth to the content and pulled-on the recognition of Tom Chapman, founder of Lions Barber Collective. Over the campaign, viewing figures reduced, most likely due to audiences feeling like they had seen one of the earlier posts. Shares, reactions and comments were more limited than might be seen in response to more 'everyday' content. It may be that the sensitivity of the subject matter impacts on viewers likelihood to react there and then – some may watch and take on board the message privately, but this cannot be quantified by the data available. There were also direct messages sent to Facebook inboxes of those supporting the campaign.

- The majority of feedback was positive and supportive of the project in terms of giving men a voice and to the approach of talking with and to each other about the themes.
- A small number of comments also expressed frustration about personal situations, support services available and questioned the efficacy of arts-based activities.
- Relationship breakdown, contact with children and debt featured as an unprompted response to why men are suffering from depression, anxiety and suicide ideation.
- Some women raised that they suffer or know someone who suffers too and questioned why the campaign was focused on men.

*"... most people don't understand the true feelings of a suicidal person. This is why people can't talk about it and who really listens and helps. People call you selfish when it's exactly the opposite, they feel a burden to others or not needed. They think they are better off dead. If they can't talk to a blood relation how can we get them to talk to a stranger. We need a better direction of help and not just words."* [Female, 13 March 2017]

*"Good work all those involved. Strong messages. Big share".* [ Male, 18 March 2017]

*"This is very interesting and I fully agree that talking is so important but the DWP in Torquay desperately needs educating in how to talk and help those who are suffering and treat them with care and understanding"* [Female, 17 March 2017]

*"... and women who do ask don't get it!".* [Female, 21 March 2017]

*"You just need to talk to somebody that will listen there is always somebody that will listen because they might have problems to".* [Female, 31 March 2017]

*"Forward thinking, inspiring and beautiful. Amazing people and project. Wow! I hope this will touch the lives of so many men out there. Bless you all."* [ Male, 4 April 2017]

*"Maybe it's because men get the short straw when it comes to seeing their children, and getting in debt for paying so much maintenance? But it will never change."* [Male, 3 April 2017]



**Spotted Torquay**

on Monday · €



**Isn't it time to Just Ask?**

Isn't it time to Just Ask?

<http://www.torbayculture.org/.../just-ask/>

11,714 Views

Like Comment Share

99

Chronological

208 shares



**Sarah Bell Tom Chapman** offers regular drop in to talk - it's this Friday at his salon opposite Waitrose - 5.30. #togetherwearestronger



Write a comment...

## EXPERIENCES & REFLECTIONS ON SUICIDE

*“People need to talk and understand. Anybody .. everybody ... male or female will suffer with this. Unless there is talk and you can support each other, you’re on your own – you’re in a bad place ...”*

*“The thing that keeps me going firstly is my children, but secondly it’s the other guys around me – knowing that they’ve gone through it, they’ve done the same sort of things and they’re still moving forward – and it’d be letting them down.”*

*“There’s a lot of confusion in your head when you’re out of your role of what your supposed to be there for. I’m a provider, I’m a father, I’m there to protect, I’m there to make sure that nothing happens that’s out of order. And if you’re not there, you’re lost.”*

*“... you can hear advice from anywhere, but it’s self belief. If you can find a tiny bit of self-belief somewhere in yourself, I believe you can pull yourself out of it. I’m sat here today, as living proof.”*

*“As a group of men we don’t talk, but as a group together you understand. We do have feelings and we can’t constantly block everything out, because once that little crack appears, and you feed into it and look into constantly that crack grows and grows and grows and if you don’t talk to somebody it gets to a point where you think you are the only one.”*

*“Men perceive it to be weak to share with one another. It’s that shame – they don’t want to fall off their big white horse and actually initiate a conversation with somebody about their emotions or feelings, because they’re afraid how the other person is going to react. Whereas I think that’s something that is internal – I think most people are actually quite welcoming.”*

*“Peer support is an extremely good way for people to work together, it’s understanding that somebody’s been through something similar to yourself - you don’t have to talk about what’s happened, it’s just an understanding. .... You are not alone – it does feel like that a lot of the time it does.”*

*“Isolation intensifies the problem coz your head turns inside. You end up talking to yourself and you make no sense coz there’s no sensible answer coming back. You’ve got to learn to trust that what a person is telling you is not going to harm you... This community thing makes it easier coz there’s no-one there to take the mickey, and that’s a good thing.”*

*“I’ve had issues with temper which have cost me my marriage and I’ve not lost my temper once since I’ve been coming here. Exercise generally, whether its boxing or any other sport gives you that buzz, adrenaline, makes you feel good. You’ve got to be brave to turn up to somewhere and do it, but its worthwhile and you feel better for it, even when it hurts.”*

## IMPACT

### Outcomes for participants (helping self)

- As a result of the interview-based process in particular, participants acted as 'ambassadors' for positive mental health and suicide prevention, sharing their own experiences. In-so-doing, they have helped to challenge the silence around suicide and depression, modeling 'talking and sharing' for others. The honesty of their testimonies (and the fact that they were much more prepared to talk openly for the purposes of the film than for private reasons) suggests that participants considered their voices to be valuable in helping others as well as themselves.
- Given participants' levels of need, it is unclear how many of the interviewees will continue as ongoing 'agents of change' without substantial support, but there was a clear interest in being part of ongoing activities in Torbay if made possible by an coordinating agency.
- As a result of challenges engaging men in the early stages of the project, the Warwick-Edinburgh scale was not used. Without this data, we cannot demonstrate conclusively that participants' mental wellbeing improved as a result of the project.
- Never-the-less, artists and the support worker reported gradual improvements in anxiety and ability to engage in positive activity for the 5 most regular attenders. For one man in particular, the project acted as the key intervention in him not taking his own life. As a result of the impact of the project, he was keen to contribute to a public-facing interview to discuss his experience.
- *"One man talked about how no other intervention that he had tried had got to him, because it hadn't enabled him to articulate his anxiety. He said very strongly, "this saved my life - it was the right thing at the right time".* [Gerry Cadogan, Public Health Principal]

### Outcomes for society (making a difference)

- The films and print materials created achieved a broad range, positively impacting on the wider community by opening up dialogue, creating opportunities for people to share their views and concerns. Quantitative data shows substantial reach and increased awareness across the local community.
- *"This project has had a great impact and had terrific continual coverage on Spotted Torquay, which reaches far beyond the usual suspects to younger men in particular, and has generated a good deal of comments. We're looking at 53,492 views – that's over a third of the population of Torbay."* [Kevin Dixon, Healthwatch Torbay]
- In combination with other local initiatives including the Lions Barber Collective, the Just Ask social media campaign appears to have made a positive contribution to breaking down stigma and barriers to 'just asking'. The volume and range of online voices (via Facebook) suggests that Torbay's informal networks are ready to build on this work and strengthen support for vulnerable men and women locally.
- One unexpected outcome of the project was that it acted as an informal 'audit' the services and activities in Torbay that are currently supporting men who feel depressed or isolated. There are already a number of individuals developing formal and informal support for men in the community, although the links between different services and support groups are still limited.
- Over the course of the project, opportunities to share the process and outcomes of the project have reached communities and Arts & Health sectors nationally and internationally. For example, through presentations of work at No Boundaries Conference and Mental Health Foundation Public Mental Health Awards.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Just Ask set out to use participatory-arts practice specifically to engage men who did not self-identify as being at risk of taking their own lives. Through the project, it became clear that interventions for those who do not self-identify need to build upon a stronger base of community-awareness around issues of depression and anxiety.
- The new direction, engaging people through the interviews/film process, created the catalyst for wider dialogue, particularly online. In-doing-so, it has increased awareness of suicide amongst people in Torbay – reaching an estimated one third of the local population. This achievement may also act to raise expectations from the community in terms of access to support services, as well as motivating more grass-roots activity.
- Much of the most successful development work in Torbay is ‘grassroots’. It builds on a model of Asset Based Community Development, where local people, skills and resources are enabled, rather than ‘parachuting in’ support from elsewhere. This also means that Torbay-wide or ‘incoming’ people and projects are necessarily approached with caution. The valuable relationships, network and trust that this project has grown now need to be built on for the future within the specific communities involved.
- This project did explicitly divert one man from the path of taking his own life, and this is significant.
- The social media campaign allowed Just Ask to reach a far greater number of people, raising awareness and opening up dialogue. Online campaigns can provide an alternative ‘democratic’ space, where people can watch, read and absorb information in private.
- It was also acknowledged that this will reach younger audiences, and that older men are far less likely to engage in through social media. Engaging with older men who do not self-identify as being at risk is still a significant challenge.
- The testimonies, only a small proportion of which were included in the films created, provide a rich resource for sharing and learning from, for both researchers and the wider community. These films provide a valuable platform for people’s stories, voices and experiences – both for Torbay, and a wider public facing similar challenges.
- Those who participated in this project were, on the whole, part of established groups – boxers, drinkers, allotment-growers, hostel-users. These groups provided a ‘holding frame’ where people felt that they belonged, making it more possible for them to engage in conversations about emotional, challenging themes. Future work would benefit from building on these groups and relationships.
- A more established or regular ‘creative making group’ for men, beyond the number of excellent local groups such as ‘In the Same Boat’ (woodworking), would benefit from a dedicated creative space that is publically accessible. This would also allow for clearer, more visible referral routes from GP surgeries for men who are suffering from anxiety and depression.

## RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

- To build on the project's achievements, particularly the improved network of understanding across arts & health in the community, and identify options for providing creative support groups for men locally as an alternative interface between those who are vulnerable and health professionals through more established channels.
- Maintaining the network of awareness is key, keeping on board those organisations that have engaged with this project, invested time, commitment and expectation.
- There is an opportunity to encourage organisations to be more visibly 'suicide aware', acting as people and places that can signpost people to support locally. This could be achieved by building on the creative resources developed through the Just Ask project – posters, films and beer-mats. The steering group also discussed the use of window-stickers to spread the word across a broader base of individuals and organisations, tying in with Public Health England campaigns and Torbay's Spotlight on Suicide.
- To provide follow-up posts to share with Spotted Torbay Facebook users on plans and direction of ongoing work to try and reduce depression, anxiety and suicide within the community. These might include follow-up interviews on the progress of men featured in the film, other opportunities for men to come forward and participate, and progress on Lions Barber Collective and other local initiatives.
- To continue tracking engagement, including on the Just Ask micro-site, film views, poster downloads to measure reach and impact over a longer period of time and to maximize future opportunities to reach people online. Tracking dissemination of other resources could also strengthen relationships with informal social support spaces.
- To develop future work in collaboration with Dr.Christabel Owens and other researchers to ensure robust delivery framework is established locally, building on process learning from *Just Ask* as part of Torbay's longer-term study of suicide reduction strategies and impact.

