

REPORT

Centre for  
Mental Health



# Thriving not just surviving

What works to improve the mental  
health of boys and young men

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BY

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RELIEF

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## Executive Summary

Comic Relief's "Thriving Not Just Surviving" initiative funded 23 projects around the UK to work with boys and young men at risk of poor mental health. Centre for Mental Health, as the external learning partner, explored and shared learning alongside the programme. By responding creatively to what was learned, the programme has successfully engaged boys and young men at scale, delivering mental health improvements and connecting boys and young men to networks of support.

We know that boys and young men can experience mental health differently to young women and girls. They may be impacted by some masculine personality traits such as perfectionism and self-criticism, be constrained by cultural ideas of masculinity and lack access to protective skills or relationships. These factors can translate into a perceived reluctance to seek help; in adjusted analyses, girls were twice as likely as boys to report willingness to use mental health services.

While the programme drew on research findings about masculinity and mental health stigma the "Thriving Not Just Surviving" projects have successfully shown boys and young men to be open to seeking and using mental health support provided it is attractive to them and adapted to suit their needs. The programme used innovative and creative models to deliver improved mental health and wellbeing. Evaluations have shown that boys and young men had improved connection to formal and informal networks of support.

Funded partners supported through 'Thriving Not Just Surviving' typically employed these methods:

- Use of creative, sporting or other positive activities
- Targeting boys and young men facing mental health inequality
- Using peer support, peer mentor or ambassador roles
- Delivering through formal and informal partnerships across organisations and sectors.
- Project models included specific adaptations for those young men and boys facing multiple disadvantages.

Through continuous learning and adaptation, the funded partners learned about better ways of reaching out to and engaging boys and young men. The widely held assumption that boys and young men are reluctant to talk about mental health has been challenged. Rather, it seemed important to offer a wide range of ways of engaging and to maintain an unstructured "non-service" feel. The more adaptable the projects' models were to the emerging needs of the boys and young men, the better they did. While posing unprecedented delivery challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic also offered new learning, especially about remote working and breaking down cross-sector barriers. Rather than requiring "male-familiarity" (a common approach of older men's mental health projects) good engagement was facilitated by projects being personal, credible and



positive. Giving boys and young men a sense of role and purpose, e.g., in social action or creative projects, could also help.

For those boys and young men facing mental health inequality and multiple, intersecting disadvantages, funded partners learned that it was important to meet basic needs like access to transport, food, safety and shelter. Boys and young men needed time, space and help to express feelings and to have those feelings accepted and validated. Strong partnerships between delivery organisations were a crucial part of reaching and helping these boys and young men.

Creative and sporting activities were the hallmark of the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme. While these approaches had variable roles within the projects, creative activities were often the most important agent of mental health improvement for boys and young men. Boys and young men were helped to develop language and understanding about mental health, to practise self-care and self-expression and to use metaphor to learn about mental health.

The “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme aimed to facilitate the involvement and participation of boys and young men as agents of change. Methods ranged from peer support to coproduction, ambassador, influencer and leadership roles. We learned that it often took time for boys and young men to develop into these roles. Less structured and more “organic” roles were often more successful. It was important to celebrate and amplify the achievements of the participants.

Most projects were delivered in either formal or informal partnerships of two or more organisations, and this was a successful feature of the programme. Partnerships required early due diligence and negotiation of cultural and structural differences between organisations, senior level buy-in and clarity of purpose and role to be effective.

## Recommendations

### To Comic Relief:

1. We recommend that Comic Relief share their findings about how best to engage boys and young men with the wider youth mental health sector
2. We recommend that Comic Relief use the learning in this report to write guidance for future funded partners on how to maximise the impact of partnership working
3. At the time of writing, funded partners still have a number of months remaining on their Comic Relief grant and project. In the final impact report, we recommend that Comic Relief shares widely how sports, creative arts and positive activities can deliver mental health outcomes for boys and young men, with detailed guidance about how to maintain good mental health governance and quality, while using metaphor, self-expression and psychoeducation to build mental health literacy, resilience and wellbeing, and identifying unexpected outcomes for men and boys with mental health problems.

**To mental health and youth services and systems:**

1. We recommend that mental health services and systems learn from the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme, understanding that boys and young men are open to mental health learning and support if it is provided in a flexible, informal and positive way
2. Organisations providing activities that boys and young men engage with (arts, sports, gaming, music) should recognise that they are instrumental in improving boys and young men's mental health. They would benefit from connecting with mental health services so that they can make referrals and share information.
3. We recommend that projects aimed at reaching boys and young men who face mental health inequality explicitly address their basic needs. It is important to allow space for boys and young men to express their experiences and feelings and have them validated
4. We recommend that projects in the mental health sector working with boys and young men develop peer support, volunteering, leadership and participation roles organically, with boys and young men themselves leading the development of the roles.

## Introduction

In 2017 Comic Relief considered a business case to allocate £3.4 million to a funding initiative that would support work with boys and young men with mental health problems, investing and driving good practice in this neglected area. The emerging initiative “Thriving Not Just Surviving” went on to fund 23 projects around the UK, running for three years with a typical grant of £120,000 to £150,000. Projects launched throughout 2018.

Centre for Mental Health was commissioned to support learning, capacity building, and systems change alongside “Thriving Not Just Surviving”. This was through a programme of annual learning and networking events, individual support to funded partners and analysing the findings they shared in reports.

When the programme model was mapped by the Centre, the organisations funded through “Thriving Not Just Surviving” saw the need for targeted work with young men and boys because:

- Boys and young men are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health
- Multiple disadvantages exacerbate this, and so targeting more vulnerable groups of young men and boys will help them engage and be well
- Gender stereotypes and constructs of masculinity harm the mental health of men and boys
- Services are not effective enough in reaching and working with boys and young men
- Communities are less able to accept and address mental ill health in boys and young men.

Collectively, the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” funded partners were working towards these outcomes for young men and boys:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Better self-esteem
- Feeling more powerful/having agency
- Being more confident
- Having less crises/being more stable
- Posing less risk to self
- Posing less risk to others
- Having a better network of support
- Having better life skills
- Having transferrable work skills/accessing training/volunteering/employment.

In addition to changing outcomes for boys and young men, the programme aspired to have long-term impacts on services and systems. The programme hoped that systems will be more appropriate to boys’ and young men’s needs, including those facing disadvantage. By amplifying their voices and experiences, “Thriving Not Just Surviving” is working to influence policy impacting boys and young men. The programme is working for a better understanding of issues affecting young men and masculinity in wider communities, resulting in a more positive

perception of men's mental health, less mental health stigma and positive responses to boys' and young men's mental health.

## Why focus on the mental health of boys and young men?

When prioritising this area, Comic Relief considered the high rates of men taking their own lives and the fact that many of these tragic losses are young men not known to mental health services. They were also aware of the higher rates of men amongst those who “go missing”, sleep rough or are in contact with the criminal justice system. The business case highlighted high rates of diagnosable mental ill health amongst school-aged boys (conduct disorder is the most common psychiatric disorder in childhood, with three times as many boys as girls being affected), and consistent evidence of less favourable attitudes towards mental ill health in some male contexts.

Current policy debate (Women and Equalities Committee 2019) about the way that men and boys are differently affected by poor mental health prompted us to explore how several factors can interact to make men and boys vulnerable, though we should be cautious of making generalisations:

- Personality traits such as the desire for perfection, being self-critical, a tendency towards concrete thinking and brooding on problems (Sutherland, 2019)
- Risk factors such as deprivation, isolation, social inequality, insecure housing, abuse, neglect, bullying, discrimination and other adverse childhood experiences (Bell, 2019)
- Cultural constraints on masculinity such as concepts of strength, independence and self-sufficiency, and a tendency to feel the impacts of mental health stigma acutely
- A lack of protective factors such as good access to education, emotional literacy and access to relationships that offer recognition of emerging mental health needs (Sutherland, 2019)
- This is seen as translating into a reluctance to seek help; in adjusted analyses, girls were twice as likely as boys to report willingness to use mental health services (Chandra, 2006).

The “Thriving Not Just Surviving” projects were designed specifically to address these factors.

Research by Robertson (2015) has identified several ways of working that may improve the effectiveness of interventions seeking to address the mental health of men and boys. This research asserts that:

- The settings within which interventions take place are critical to the creation of a safe space. Settings need to be ‘male friendly’ and culturally sensitive to the specific requirements of different groups of men and boys
- Interventions should take a positive approach to working with boys and men. Robertson argues that working in a ‘male positive’ manner is often crucial to sustained involvement

- The style and language used can make a significant difference to successfully engaging men and boys. Using male oriented terms (e.g., ‘activity’ rather than ‘health’; ‘regaining control’ rather than ‘help-seeking’) makes projects more familiar and less off-putting
- Staff/facilitator characteristics and skills must align with interventions’ values and approaches. Taking a non-judgmental and empathetic approach to working with men and boys is vital in providing the right type of environment and supportive approach
- Male familiar activity-based interventions seem to offer promise. Activities can provide a ‘hook’ to encourage engagement into interventions and provide a group context which promotes social inclusion and enjoyment
- Successful interventions are ‘grounded’. Being community based allows interventions to remain close to the men and boys they are working with and assists in promoting social inclusion
- An awareness of the different socio-cultural contexts of groups of men and boys, such as groups facing racial inequality, as well gay and bisexual men, is important. Inequalities faced by different groups impact on mental wellbeing and interventions need to feel relevant to them
- Partnerships are crucial across all phases of intervention, development and implementation. Partnership working offers a number of benefits for services, including creating credibility and extending reach and resources. Partnerships need to be sensitive to the ‘male positive’ approach and should be aligned with attributes which promote positive working with men and boys around their mental health (Robertson, 2015).

While there is a general perception in mental health services that ‘arms-length’ approaches, such as online initiatives and telephone services, given their anonymity and accessibility, would be more appropriate to boys and men, Robertson and his team found limited evidence to support this. In the last year, most support services have transferred their delivery to arms-length approaches due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we discuss what “Thriving Not Just Surviving” funded partners have learned through Covid-19 in the “Learning” chapter of this report.

The research suggests that integrating the above approaches across systems maximised impact, and that the wider policy and economic landscape in which services were delivered also had a strong bearing on their success.



## The Thriving Not Just Surviving programme

“Thriving Not Just Surviving” supported organisations/partnerships working with boys and young men aged 11-20 who are experiencing mental health problems. A significant proportion of the funded partners engaged boys and young men in delivery of aspects of their projects, for example in peer supporter or ambassador roles.

The “Thriving Not Just Surviving” projects operate in and hope to influence the wider communities and services where boys and young men live, learn and work. Projects delivered:

- Group activities with varying levels of mental health specific content
- One-to-one support work
- Talking therapies
- Peer support models
- Social marketing, campaign and awareness raising projects
- Safe spaces
- Co-production and participation work.

A detailed logic model of the programme is shown in appendix 1.

The projects collected and shared learning and evidence of impact to be disseminated across systems. Boys and young men have been involved in creating marketing materials, training, and in wider planning, service design and review. Projects shared messages about boys’ and young men’s mental health in the media and ran campaigns.

The “Thriving Not Just Surviving” approach typically contained these methods:

- Almost all of the projects **used creative, sporting or other positive activities** such as team sports, fitness, film-making, individual sports, outward bound activities, spoken word/rap, visual arts, drama, music and meditation
- Just over half of the projects were **targeted at those facing mental health inequality** in some way. The groups of boys and young men that were targeted across the programme were communities facing racial inequality, unaccompanied asylum seeking or trafficked, at risk of perpetrating violence or who are gang affiliated, victims of sexual violence, experiencing homeless, leaving care, Gay, Bi-sexual or Trans
- Around half of the projects described a specific and separate **peer support, peer mentor or ambassador role** at set-up or year one, and most projects have elements of user participation and voice in their project.
- About a quarter of projects involved formal (and financial) **partnerships** in their plans, but almost all projects have said that they are working with other agencies in their delivery or oversight. Partners range from statutory agencies such as health trusts, local authorities and schools, other mental health voluntary sector providers, non-mental health voluntary sector providers and businesses.

## **The funded partners and their projects**

Below is a brief description of each project. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many funded partners adapted these models, transferring most work to remote working.

### **A Place for Us; Art Angel**

A Place for Us planned to work with young men to address addiction, self-harming, and suicidal behaviour through engaging in arts activities. It enabled young men to develop their creativity and improve their own mental health, interrupting patterns of long-term mental ill health in men in Dundee. The work was delivered through a three-year programme of art-making, film-making and drama.

### **Building Resilience in Young Men; Aberlour Child Care Trust**

Building Resilience in Young Men planned to provide specialist group work for young unaccompanied men who have arrived in Glasgow via trafficking or to seek asylum, with no parent or family member. The work was to help them learn about mental health and try out different types of activity-based support in order to improve their resilience and ability to manage their mental health difficulties.

### **Cornerman; Off the Record (Bristol)**

Cornerman planned to use boxing to engage young men with mental health needs from communities facing racial inequality alongside other young men and boys in a programme of psychologically informed coaching and support. It ran in Bristol from a local boxing gym on weekday evenings and aimed to improve the mental health, behaviour and resilience of these young men.

### **By Us, For Us; Young People Cornwall**

By Us, For Us planned to support young men in Cornwall who experience difficulties with their mental health and have a key vulnerability such as substance misuse, a learning difficulty, or experience of domestic abuse. Support was through weekly activity-based groups, one-to-one sessions and a residential, facilitated by youth workers and peer leaders.

### **Film 42; 42nd Street**

Film 42 was a partnership between 42nd Street, Survivors Manchester and TIPP, to co-create short films with young Black men aged 16-20 who are in the criminal justice system. The films drive two significant changes: engaging more young black men in therapeutic support, and driving system change to make mental health services more accessible for these young men.

### **Hafal**

Hafal aimed to provide an alternative model of early intervention support using music to engage with young men in South Wales who have experienced an episode of psychosis. Young men engaged in community-based group music sessions, whilst also being offered support on a 1-1 basis to further develop their social and emotional needs.

### **Hear My Mind; Off the Record Youth Counselling Croydon**

Hear My Mind supported and engaged with grassroots organisations, local barbers and youth services in Croydon and Merton. They partnered with key players and champions to positively engage with young men and boys from communities facing racial inequality through spoken word poetry, rap and other forms of creative arts and sports.

### **Inner Strength; Coram's Fields**

The Inner Strength project planned to bring together partners to support young men involved in, and at risk of being involved in, serious youth violence in Camden and Islington, providing youth casework support and music and employability sessions, whilst working alongside a clinical psychologist to help identify and support the mental health issues that the young men face.

### **In Your Corner; London Community Boxing**

In Your Corner in Southwark is a noncontact boxing group programme with an integrated mental health component. It planned to target young men with complex social, emotional, and behavioural needs, taking evidence-based ideas from psychological intervention and delivering them in a flexible way, alongside boxing skills.

### **#Let's Do It; Middlesbrough Mind**

#Let's Do It planned to work with young care leavers and members of communities facing racial inequality in Stockton and Middlesbrough by providing programmes of sports and arts activities, group work and peer support.

### **Level up; Streetwise**

Streetwise planned to recruit young men from communities facing racial inequality in Newcastle to be representatives of their communities and act as champions. They ran programmes of arts-based and cultural activities to engage young men and to highlight the range of issues and concerns these young men face, while also engaging more young men with Streetwise services.

### **Men's Total Health; Yorkshire MESMAC**

Men's Total Health improved the mental wellbeing and resilience of GBT young men in Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield and West Yorkshire by offering direct therapeutic groups, building community capacity and resilience through community peer mentors. It encouraged group members into sports and physical activity through a buddying scheme and working with sports clubs and facilities to help them be more Gay, Bisexual and Transgender friendly.

### **Mind Your Head; Centrepoin**

Mind Your Head worked with young homeless men in Manchester. The project employed a specialist mental health advisor to work individually with young men and run group sessions which helped them develop positive coping strategies and improve their mental wellbeing.

### **My View; British Refugee Council**

My View aimed to improve the psychological and emotional wellbeing of unaccompanied children who have arrived in the UK as refugees, through a combination of culturally sensitive one-to-one therapy and group work, including client-led therapy sessions based on a psychosocial/holistic approach using creative arts, play and talking. Psychoeducational workshops and social outings are two of the other activities offered.

### **Project Future; Mind in Haringey**

Project Future in Haringey worked with young men involved with gangs, youth violence and crime to deliver accessible mental health interventions in their community, through holistic support delivered by clinical psychologists.

### **Psyched!; Positive Futures North Liverpool**

In North Liverpool, Psyched! offered young men a wide range of programmes designed to tackle resolvable mental health difficulties. Using activities to engage and support young men, the project aimed to help them develop effective coping strategies.

### **Sport and Thought; Brent Centre for Young People**

Sport and Thought planned to deliver mental health support to young men facing barriers to accessing traditional mental health services, in three different community outlets in North-West London. The project was aimed at men and boys who are struggling with behavioural, emotional and psychosocial difficulties. It involved weekly sessions of football-based activities run by psychotherapists experienced in football coaching and working with young people.

### **Teens and Toddlers Wellbeing; Power 2**

Working in Hackney and surrounding areas in London, Teens and Toddlers planned to raise the skills and confidence of young men with mental health problems from communities facing racial inequality by supporting them to be role-models for pre-school children.

### **The Endeavour Project; Lighthouse Ireland Ltd**

The Endeavour Project in North Belfast built teams of peer mentors in schools to positively change young men's attitudes to mental health and enable the development of help-seeking behaviours. Peer mentors were trained to influence their schools, create safe spaces, address mental health challenges, and support fellow students.

### **Webchat expansion; Campaign Against Living Miserably**

The Webchat expansion built the capacity of CALM's front-line services, so they would be available to more young men who need urgent support when facing mental health crisis and/or suicide risk. The helpline and web chat were oversubscribed, and the extension enabled longer opening hours and more capacity to ensure CALM could respond to all men who contact them.

### **Well Lads; Student Minds**

Well Lads supported male students to design and deliver mental health focused activities for male students aged 18-20. These were planned for three different universities and evaluated to identify effective approaches to helping male students to be better aware of their own and others' mental health and wellbeing, have the tools to manage this and to seek support where necessary.



### **Young Men & Mental Health; Refugee Resource**

Young Men & Mental Health provided football sessions to engage newly arrived and isolated young men who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, and ringfenced therapeutic sessions to address their mental health needs. The project also developed user-led design and trialled a wider range of engagement activities.

### **Young Men's Healthy Minds Project; Midlothian YP Advice Service**

The project worked in Midlothian and provided a range of arts, relaxation and meditation programmes for groups of 6-8 young men at a time. Group work was further supported by one-to-one support where required.

## Learning

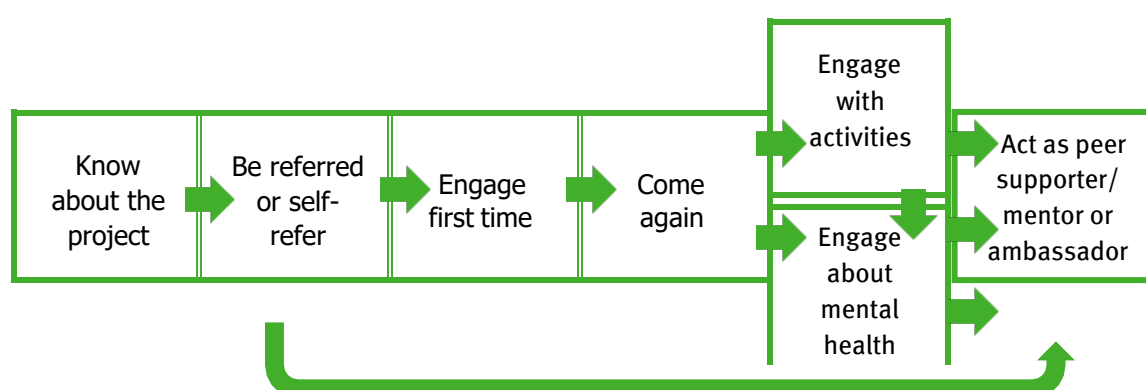
Through the life of the external learning partnership with “Thriving Not Just Surviving”, Centre for Mental Health gathered and shared information about what the funded partners were learning and how this was influencing their work. The themes were extracted from review of funded partners’ reports, and exploration at learning events.

### Successful engagement of boys and young men

In year one of the learning of the programme we explored engagement, knowing that research suggests that boys and young men are less well reached by mental health support.

The Centre identified several different stages of engagement and characterised this as a “pathway” for boys and young men. Boys and young men would progress from initial awareness of and contact with the project, to sustained and meaningful engagement with their own mental health or that of their peers.

*Engagement pathway:*



Not surprisingly, all projects faced struggles with engagement, though where on the above “pathway” the challenges arose varied. Funded partners noted these factors that improved or enhanced boys’ and young men’s engagement across the pathway:

- Well planned, appropriate communication, promotion and networking
- Ground-level partners, acting as allies who facilitate engagement, and who have aligned objectives and values
- Locating activities and services as near as possible to where boys and young men were
- Making activities socially and culturally acceptable to boys and young men. Contrary to other research, this was less about “male-friendliness”, and more about informality of structures and being personable, credible, light-hearted and engaging

- Employing some staff and volunteers that reflect the young men demographically, including in mental health specialist roles, as this modelled openness to addressing mental health
- If projects targeted vulnerability, doing so in a non-stigmatising and informal way
- Using “calls to action” and giving boys and young men roles or work to do
- Explicitly addressing the complexity and stresses of young men’s lives
- Avoiding an excessive focus on mental health and traditional mental health support approaches
- Engaging boys and young men as equal experts on their mental health alongside (but not superseding) professionals.
- Using celebration and recognition of boys’ and young men’s achievements.

After the first year, projects made adaptations to their model across this pathway, and as a result have not only tended to reach more boys and young men, but also learned how to maintain this engagement (with most projects having higher than expected retention or attendance rates) and find innovative ways of supporting boys and young men towards mental health outcomes.

“We found many of the young people we aim to engage have complex relationships to help-seeking and are highly mistrustful of professionals, which creates a barrier to them engaging with support. We have learnt that the young people engage most effectively through youth led project activities”

Funded partner

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that Comic Relief share their findings about how best to engage boys and young men with the wider youth mental health sector

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that mental health services and systems learn from the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme, understanding that boys and young men are open to mental health learning and support if it is provided in a flexible, informal and positive way

## Learning from delivering through the Coronavirus pandemic

In the heart of the second year of the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme the Covid-19 pandemic and all its resulting disruption to society struck. For all the projects the crisis was a major challenge. Several projects who worked closely with young men and boys facing racial inequality also commented on the additional stresses of Covid-19’s disproportionate impact on

their communities, plus the murder of George Floyd and subsequent global attention on the black community's experience of violence.

The most common impacts reported by funded partners were:

- Stress levels rising, especially fear for family health
- Rising mental ill health, in particular anxiety
- Less response from other services to young men, e.g., schools and mental health services
- More stressors such as delayed asylum claims, rising street-based violence in communities.

“lockdown has been good in some ways with partners – easier to meet people and find time with them”

Funded partner

Organisations themselves also faced new challenges, with falling income for those who relied on income from schools or training, or from public donations. Staff were furloughed in some organisations, and capacity fell as some staff were absent from work due to illness or self-isolating. All organisations needed to adapt to new working conditions.

All funded partners adapted their delivery to respond to the pandemic.

### *Moving to remote working*

Almost all projects attempted a move to remote contact with young men and boys, with varying levels of success. Projects that did so more successfully seem to have quickly moved to multiple ways of connecting, by using phone, text, video, social media approaches all at once. This means that young men and boys who could not use one method would have alternatives.

Some projects found that their clients found remote working much less effective and tended to accept a period of reduced delivery. These were projects that were very reliant on face-to-face contact, such as sports projects, or those reliant on partner organisations (e.g. schools or youth clubs) which were closed. A significant proportion of young men did not have the means to engage online, lacking either devices, connection to the internet or privacy to connect.

Several projects commented that some boys and young men engaged better remotely than they had done face-to-face. This was perhaps because they found travel difficult, were socially anxious or preferred to engage outside of normal working hours.

Online sessions tended to be shorter and more frequent.

“We have learned that some young men work well without face-to-face, while others find it difficult to not be distracted from the conversation or do not wish to get involved in protracted engagements. This has meant that telephone or text support is extremely varied depending on the individual”

Funded partner

### *More one-to-one contact*

Group work was a common format for “Thriving Not Just Surviving” projects. For many, this was not possible remotely during the lockdown. Online group interactions became unworkable, either because of the quality of the interaction being lost, or because it felt impossible to keep boys and young men safe in large online groups. There was also a sense of heightened mental health risk for boys and young men during the lockdown, and several projects focused their attention on the most at-risk young men and boys.

“We encouraged young BAME men to embrace their hair growth while they had no access to a barber during Covid. In getting involved with our #NoTrimChallenge, we promised to pay for their first haircut after lockdown. This project received much praise from local statutory and voluntary sector partners and attracted local media attention”

Funded partner

### *New content*

Many projects responded to the Covid-19 crisis with new content. Some delivered materials, such as arts or digital resources to young men and boy’s homes. Others added different content, e.g., on managing stress and self-care. There was a particular focus in content on positivity; male positivity, body positivity and cultural positivity in response to the Black Lives Matters events and movement.

### *Improved multi-agency working*

There were two main ways that multi-agency working improved during the Covid-19 crisis. Firstly, rising concerns about some young men and boys whose mental health or safety was particularly affected prompted projects to proactively reach out to any other agency in contact with the young man and their family.

Secondly, funded partners recognised that other organisations in their network/partnership were facing a unique set of challenges and altruistically reached out to help. For example, projects

“In these cases, the effect of COVID has been to accelerate initiatives which otherwise may have taken months or even years to come to fruition”

Funded partner

reached out to schools who were struggling with the September return to school, to youth clubs forced to close or to health colleagues who had impacted capacity. This sense of urgency and removal of some previous organisational barriers energised some of the funded partners and helped them move forward with improved relationships.



## Working with boys and young men facing mental health inequality

Just over half of the projects targeted groups who face mental health inequality. This targeting was sometimes exclusive, in that only boys and young men from that community were admitted to the project. Some projects were more open, where projects were designed to be more accessible to boys and young men of a particular group but welcomed others also.

The groups of boys and young men that were targeted across the programme were:

- At risk of perpetrating violence or gang affiliated
- Communities facing racial inequality
- Care leavers
- Gay, Bi-sexual or Trans
- Homeless
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking, refugees or trafficked
- Victims of sexual violence.

About a third of projects said that the young men they worked with were being negatively impacted by systemic problems, and the projects reaching out to the most marginalised communities were disproportionately affected. Some of the challenges were:

- Cuts in other services meaning that onward referral was difficult
- Lack of joined up working making systems difficult to negotiate
- Rising rates of serious youth violence in communities
- Complex legal processes affecting asylum claims
- Lack of affordable or suitable housing
- Rising availability and use of synthetic substances such as “Spice”
- Financial hardship caused by Universal Credit introduction, exclusion from benefits or the financial impact of the pandemic
- Negative media coverage of trans inclusion.

“the target group was already dealing with lots of segregation – the learning was to involve everybody”

Funded partner

These challenges affected projects by making project access more difficult, by increasing the workload of staff and by affecting boys’ and young men’s ability to recover and move on.

Four projects said that outcomes were being affected by rising serious youth violence in their area. This affected boys’ and young men’s sense of safety, ability to travel to projects, staff time needed for risk assessment and mitigation, or extra police attention to the project. Interestingly, there were comments that the policy and media attention on knife and gun violence could be counterproductive, with some areas subject to multiple initiatives that were badly coordinated. Funded partners commented that there could be a negative impact directly on young men (stress,

trauma, anxiety, poverty, and discrimination) and on the project efficacy (lack of funding, staff distraction, increasing complexity, and logistical barriers).

We worked with a group of projects to explore how they were responding to these external factors to maximise positive mental health outcomes for boys and young men. These themes emerged:

- An initial and continuous focus on physical safety and other basic needs (food, shelter, warmth, freedom from fear)
- Active connections to other agencies, with champion and senior roles communicating about the pressures to ensure a joined up and intelligence-led approach
- Acknowledging and validating the fears and stresses on boys and young men to them
- Engaging boys and young men as activists and agents of change, by letting them amplify their experiences of the pressures and participate in the strategic planning of solutions.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that projects aimed at reaching boys and young men who face mental health inequality explicitly address their basic needs. It is important to allow appropriate and authentic space for boys and young men to express their experiences and feelings and have them validated

## Sports, arts and creativity as a mental health resource for boys and young men

Almost all of the projects were using some kind of creative or positive activity in their work with boys or young men. Given that Comic Relief has a history of funding sports for change projects, it is not surprising to have found a lot of projects using sports in their activities. Just under half of the projects were using more than one activity type.

During year two several projects had expanded their range of activities and saw this as a successful way of improving responsiveness, engagement and outcomes.

In year one's review we noted that activities should avoid an excessive focus on mental ill health and needed to be socially and culturally acceptable to young men, though not necessarily traditionally "male familiar". What seemed more important was that activities were uplifting and engaging.

The key way in which activities impacted on outcomes for young men were explored in year two reflections from the projects:

- As a **"hook" to engagement** – a few projects had explicitly planned activities to attract boys and young men to their project, and they would then further engage them with more mental health support such as counselling



- As a means of **self-expression** – by producing creative output, especially if this was then shown or celebrated, projects recognised improvement in young men’s self-esteem and confidence
- A “**try something new**” approach to activities could open boys and young men to also trying new ways of caring for their health. In particular, several projects extended into outings and residential in year two and realised this was having a positive effect on young men’s openness to new ideas or experiences
- Activities were a way of **breaking down barriers** and opening boys and young men to being together and communicating in different ways. This might be through allowing young men to be silly, distracted or playful
- Activities often created an opportunity to use **metaphor** to help young men learn about and experience mental health. For example, an activity may create a learning opportunity by pausing and reflecting on the feelings or behaviours that happened in the activity. Activities could also be used in planning self-care, for example by identifying the way that plants or animals were nurtured and grown
- Activities were a way of **creating positive memories** and overcoming traumatic memories
- In the year one review we explored the range of approaches within the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme to bringing mental health interventions to young men and boys. Some projects used traditional mental health interventions such as counselling or online crisis support. Others had added **mental health content alongside creative or sporting activities**. Most commonly though, projects were integrating mental health content into their activities. This meant recognising the mental health value of creative and positive activities in themselves, but also incorporating mental health knowledge within them.

“[the project gives me] a space to properly express myself which I’ve never really had before. Drama gives me a way to express the feelings I have and share that with others which is really good”

Young man

In year two, the learning from this approach was starting to take shape. Commonly, mental health professionals were integrated into youth work settings and offered direct mental health support to young men and boys, as well as to youth work staff.

### *Psychoeducation*

While the projects have pushed back at times against the gender stereotype that young men and boys tend to have less language and knowledge about emotions and mental health, many projects did recognise the importance of psychoeducation (helping people to access the facts about a broad range of mental illnesses in a clear and concise manner). In the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” context this tended to be more about normalising mental health language and conversation through informal discussion. Most commonly this was done opportunistically as discussions arose with young men and boys. Often, activities were used as an opportunity to notice and reflect on emotional states.

“Therapeutic conversations based on evidence-based psychological approaches will be wrapped around everyday interactions and activities where young people feel comfortable and in control (i.e., whilst cooking, playing PlayStation, in the music studio)”

Funded partner

### *Blending mental health and youth work skills*

In the year one review we recognised the importance of the youth work skill set that many of the projects had brought in alongside mental health knowledge and skills. This blended response was particularly successful, and projects had achieved it in several ways.

Some projects had brought mental health professionals such as counsellors or psychologists into direct contact with boys and young men in youth work settings and activities. This often involved helping the mental health professional to learn about youth work and to learn youth engagement skills from youth work professionals.

“All [youth centre] staff have attended 1 to 1 and group case consultation sessions to consider mental health and wellbeing issues impacting specific young people in their clinical work”

Funded partner

In addition, some projects had brought mental health professionals into clinical governance or supervision roles. For example, projects established formal or informal mental health training and support for non-mental health professionals, such as weekly meetings, telephone advice, clinical supervision or social media networks.

## CASE STUDY:

### *Using positive activities to achieve mental health outcomes*

An organisation working with unaccompanied boys who had newly arrived in the UK seeking asylum planned a project to address their mental health. Building on the success of a football group for boys, the team planned to develop a wide range of positive activities as “tasters”, from sports to arts and outward bounds activities, using a steering group of young men to guide their offer. In fact, the project team soon learned that they needed to work with partners to engage young men and recruiting to the steering group proved too difficult. A process of trial and error with activities was a better way to see which “struck a chord” with the young men. The team were surprised at which activities resonated and allowed young men to open up about their mental health and previous trauma. Surprisingly, one of the young men asked to visit a horse rescue centre and an equine therapy course was developed. A young man who was very anxious about doing new things learned to overcome his fear of horses and developed resources he transferred to his daily life.

## RECOMMENDATION

At the time of writing, funded partners still have a number of months remaining on their Comic Relief grant and project. In the final impact report, we recommend that Comic Relief shares widely how sports, creative arts and positive activities can deliver mental health outcomes for boys and young men, with detailed guidance about how to maintain good mental health governance and quality, while using metaphor, self-expression and psychoeducation to build mental health literacy, resilience and wellbeing, and identifying unexpected outcomes for men and boys with mental health problems.

## RECOMMENDATION

Organisations providing activities that boys and young men engage with (arts, sports, gaming, music) should recognise that they are instrumental in improving boys and young men's mental health. They would benefit from connecting with mental health services so that they can make referrals and share information.

## Partnership working

While a minority of funded partners were sharing funding in a formal partnership across several organisations, most were working in partnership with others. Partnership formats included



formalised co-delivery arrangements, sub-contracting arrangements, colocation or venue rental and referral arrangements (both in and out of the project).

Projects were sometimes using the partnership model to “buy in” a specialism or specific skill, such as clinical skills. Other partnerships were driven by a need to access a particular group of boys and young men whom a partner was already in contact with. Other partnerships were hoping to establish a pathway by which boys and young men may move between partners’ projects. In the year one review we learned that projects that invested time in creating close, aligned, structured, predictable partnerships tended to be more successful. In particular, the year one review noted the importance of senior level buy-in and regular networking.

“it can be difficult to align to the mission of the partner organisation in a way that is useful”

Funded partner

As “Thriving Not Just Surviving” partnerships matured, some themes emerged about the nature of successful partnerships:

- **Complimentary skill sets**– partnerships worked better when it was clear in what way the workforce’s skills complimented each other. This was often with one partner bringing strong engagement and relationships with young men and boys, and another bringing mental health skills
- **Investing time and energy on relationships and integration** – For example, having regular, routine staff meetings, or having staff spend time observing each other at work. This allowed staff to gain an understanding of the culture and practice of their partner organisations. Physical outreach to informal partners was a feature of several projects. There was an additional benefit in that partners’ staff became “familiar faces” to young men and boys and so improved their engagement

“working style and patterns that are different can be a challenge to manage”

Funded partner

- **Addressing structural barriers** – Several partnerships were not successful, and this tended to be for reasons such as strict referral criteria or organisational requirements, or an insurmountable difference of organisational ethos and culture. These mismatches were most common with statutory partners (schools or health teams). Evaluation in year two suggested that where they could not be successfully addressed the partnership generally broke down. We learned that such problems should be explicitly addressed early on, and if this is not possible it may be best to seek a different partner, as several “Thriving Not Just Surviving” projects did. In a small number of cases, it was appropriate to be open to terminating partnerships or reworking agreements, and Comic Relief played an important role in supporting funded partners at this time
- **Developing new partnerships continuously** – for the less formal partnerships such as those facilitating referral pathways or skills exchanges, the more successful projects saw this as an ongoing task of the project, and they worked on finding new partners

throughout the project course. Partnerships enhanced the flexibility and responsiveness on offer to young men and boys

- **A “win-win” exchange of assets** – the more successful partnerships were clear about the assets that each partner brought and took away. For example, one partner may be struggling to engage with a particular group of young men and boys, who the other partner had good relationships with, and another partner may be struggling to engage young men with mental health support. These assets often included buildings or space
- **Good visibility and promotion** – having strong local community and sector awareness tended to create a “virtuous cycle” of improving and expanding partnerships

"However, we can engage better with young people by linking in with youth groups, schools, colleges where they attend activities. This has proved an effective way of engagement and a model we will continue to use

Funded partner

A lack of potential partners in a space (geographic or demographic) could be a barrier to delivery that projects struggled to overcome.

## CASE STUDY:

### *Partnership working to respond to emerging needs of boys and young men*

A “Thriving Not Just Surviving” project was created to help a youth mental health organisation to improve their support to young Black men. Their project had partnership working at its heart. They opened with some research to understand why young Black men were not accessing mental health support. They learned that young men were not relating their experiences to the language of mental health, and they also did not see people who looked like them in mental health organisations. They also stated that they would like to see examples of other young men who had experienced mental health difficulties and were now managing and thriving. The project went out to find partner organisations that would help address some of these findings and engaged a film-making organisation. This brought further innovation and expertise they needed into the project. The project also chose to work with Survivors Manchester; a project for male survivors of sexual violence so they could enable difficult conversations to begin around the ‘taboo’ subjects of sexual violence and mental health.

Over time the needs of the project changed. There were some traumatic events that impacted the local community. The project was approached by a local youth project to help start discussions and training around trauma informed practice with local ‘grassroots’ youth workers who were motivated to make changes in their community. This connection in turn increased the number of Black young men asking for and engaging with mental health support with the project.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that Comic Relief use the learning in this report to write guidance for future funded partners on how to maximise the impact of partnership working

## Flexible and adaptable project design

"The main challenge over the last 18 months has been generating a large number of referrals every 8 weeks with our original model... ..we are now allowing the young men to access the service for as long as they require support"

Funded partner

From the first year, it became clear that the most successful approaches were those that adapted and changed in response to learning. In year one projects were already adapting delivery models to meet challenges, and this continued well into the second year, when the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a wholesale redesign for many.

In year one we found that projects were more successful if they explicitly addressed these challenges

and adapted their delivery as rapidly as possible.

### *Adapting timings*

The most common adaptation to project models were in timings. Many of the projects found that they needed to extend their period of contact with boys and young men to allow for engagement to take place, across the engagement journey, as described above. This might be to allow longer to build initial relationships, or to allow young men and boys to engage with subject matter or to recover enough to leave the project. The common denominator of these changes was to be more flexible, allowing young men and boys more choice in when and for how long they engage. By year two, few of the projects had very structured timings, tending instead to allow young men to engage in their own time and leave in their own time. Projects may then have had to change their referral structures, and for some, their overall reach fell, but they felt they were achieving better outcomes.

"the time required to build trust with each young man, since many have been betrayed, abandoned and abused, so building a secure attachment with another adult is fraught with danger for them"

Funded partner

### *Adapting referral criteria*

Other adaptations that projects made were to shift their eligibility criteria. In all cases this was to relax referral criteria, allowing for example, more self-identification of eligibility. We found in year one that young men and boys were less likely to engage if they saw projects as having a "service" culture, and so strict referral criteria could be off-putting.

It is worth noting here a spectrum of responses from the projects to the idea of "men-only" spaces. Around half of the projects used male only groups, and half of the projects targeted men and boys but remained open to people who describe their gender differently. There were no conclusions

from the projects' self-evaluations about the relative merits of these approaches. Having mixed gender groups allowed the projects to feel more "natural" and also introduced the boys and young men to young women and girls, and people who describe their gender differently, in a context where they may learn about different aspects of gender. At a practical level, projects came across girls and young women who needed the support of their projects and wanted to include them to fit with their ethos.

For other projects, they realised there was value in male only spaces. They allowed boys and young men to feel open to discuss vulnerability and for some projects, male only groups were a stepping stone for boys and young men to then engage in mixed gender spaces in the wider organisation.

### *Adapting activities*

By the end of year two, a minority of the projects were delivering their work in the exact way that they had envisaged at the start of year one. Projects had made adaptations to their model, for example making groups more or less open, shifting to different creative or positive activities or changing the format of activities. It is notable that in year two an increasing number of projects had started to take the boys and young men they worked with away on trips and residencies.

"We continued to allow girls to attend at the club. This had a positive effect: boys are getting used to having girls in leadership positions, adding a gender-sensitive perspective to team interactions and leadership, and developing more awareness amongst the boys in being inclusive and sensitive to the smaller group of girls"

Funded partner

"It made us realise it is ok if they don't quite fit the pigeonhole description of eligibility at that given time. Elements of the course will result in them exploring where they may fit (at this time) on the wide spectrums of sexuality/gender"

Funded partner

Taking time away from their existing context was often mentioned as a valuable vehicle for improving outcomes.

### *Covid-19 adaptations*

While this situation was undoubtedly challenging, many projects also identified learning that they would take forward after the crisis passes. Most commonly, this was that the main Covid-19 adaptations; online sessions, more one-to-one support and more outdoor activities had been beneficial to some young men and boys and could be offered as choices in future.



## CASE STUDY:

### *Adapting project models*

A university student mental health project was funded to create a volunteer driven project where male students created peer support groups, mental health workshops and a podcast. A lot of time was spent recruiting volunteers who then coproduced the initiatives. However, as the projects were due to launch, the pandemic effectively closed universities and made the original model impossible. The team brought the issue to the volunteers for their suggestions.

Some challenges with digital connectivity were faced by moving materials to platforms that could be worked on offline. Some volunteers had to withdraw as the socio-economic impact and other challenges of the pandemic led to a deterioration in their mental health and ability to volunteer. The team had to consider how to ensure these volunteers could access the help they needed.

The young men decided to focus all the resource on to a podcast. As there were no longer any geographical restrictions, the recruitment pool could be widened. The target community and staff team were already very digitally skilled, and this was an advantage. The narrower focus on one medium (the podcast) allowed the team to focus a more in-depth training offer for the young volunteers. Comic Relief was flexible and quick to approve any reallocation of funds.

### **Participation and involvement of boys and young men**

Many funded partners had planned to include peer support or young men's and boys' activism in project models, from formal leadership and volunteering roles to informal peer support within groups. On the whole, the more formal leadership or volunteering roles had been more difficult to establish.

### *Groups*

Most projects used group activity. Some also offered one-to-one contact. On the whole, group activity was seen as more effective, and often group contact alongside one-to-one support was seen as optimal. The more choice young men and boys had about when and how to use group and/or one-to-one support the better. The more successful group activities were those with a

“Through talking openly about their mental health, the young men have been pushing back against stereotypes about masculinity amongst each other”

Funded partner

predictable structure (which helped boys and young men feel safe) but with choice and time for young men to build friendships. Nearly all groups used a mix of positive and creative activities and mental health content, whether integrated or separate.

### *Peer support*

In year two the projects had begun to notice, far more than in year one, that young men were supporting each other's mental health recovery. While in year one, formal peer supporter roles had been harder to get off the ground, in year two, projects noted the importance of informal relationships that had developed in groups of young men and boys. Many funded partners told us about the importance of relationships and friendships which had been a challenge for some of these boys and young men due to their isolation.

### *Consultation and coproduction*

While several projects had planned formal consultation or coproduction stages, these could be quite challenging to deliver. In year one we noted that boys and young men may need some clarity about the nature of a group or activity before joining, and an open conversation could be hard to engage with. In fact, coproduction of the model happened as an ongoing process throughout most projects and was continuing into year three.

### *Formal participatory roles*

About half of the projects had formal leadership, coproduction or other participation roles

“We have continued to struggle to engage young men as ‘community champions’ per se although a number were engaged in other capacities”

Funded partner

designed into their projects from the start. These were as volunteers, peer mentors, ambassadors or champions. By year two, some of these roles had not been successful (particularly where the Covid-19 crisis had affected this model, halting many group activities and closing schools). In many cases this was because the presenting needs of the young men and boys meant they could not engage in a formal role until their lives had stabilised. It could also be difficult for young men to sustain engagement with formal roles. However, other projects had introduced more formal roles, for example as young men and boys “graduated” from the project and wanted to remain involved to support others. Projects learned that a sense of role, purpose and responsibility was having a good impact on boys’ and young men’s self-esteem and confidence.

Four of the projects offered accreditation or qualification to boys and young men, and all had found this to be a valued part of their project.

### *Young men and boys as influencers*

The “Thriving Not Just Surviving” Programme has an ambition to effect change beyond the lives of the boys and young men being directly engaged. Several projects were helping young men and boys to have their voices heard and to get involved in influencing wider changes in society and in mental health systems. Examples of this were:

- Engaging young men and boys in local area reviews of mental health services
- Involving young men in creative and media activity, e.g. for World Mental Health Day
- Young men and boys presenting to their peers, e.g. at school assemblies
- Involving young men and boys in creating strategy or policy for organisations.

"it's a change within themselves and groups first, then the community and other young people outside the programme"

Funded partner

## CASE STUDY:

### *Involvement and peer support*

Andrew came to an art project via mental health services. He always felt like an outsider, had struggled to make friends at secondary school and didn't feel like he fitted in, leaving him feeling confused, withdrawn and very isolated.

He began to really struggle with depression in his late teens and it became so debilitating he contemplated suicide. He was, he says, existing not living.

He says, "even though I knew my family really cared, I didn't feel like I could really talk, I felt like nobody understood me. In a way I kind of numbed myself to everything, I felt like a ghost".

When Andrew came to the young men's project he was at the end of his tether. He joined drama because he liked to write and he thought he could be someone else, not himself. "[F]or the first time I don't feel like an outsider. It's been fantastic to be able to go somewhere and feel accepted and be creative. I come every week for the drama group, it's weird I find acting easy, in a way you put on a mask. But I suppose I've always put on a mask".

He has gone from strength to strength. Initially he was unable to speak up, he felt anything he said would be laughed at. Once he got to know staff and began to tentatively speak to the other young men, he began to realise they all felt the same. Gradually he came out of his shell and began writing plays and acting even in the streets of Dundee. "It give you a space to properly express myself which I've never had before. Drama gives me a way to express the feelings I have and share that with others which is really good". Andrew has now performed live in front of an audience on three occasions and says he felt terrified but elated afterwards! He is now very encouraging and supportive of the newer members of the group.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that projects in the mental health sector working with boys and young men develop peer support, volunteering, leadership and participation roles organically, with boys and young men themselves leading the development of the roles.

### Successful project delivery

In the first year of the learning work, Centre for Mental Health focused attention on the success factors and challenges when delivering these projects.

All projects had faced some challenges in their first year. Most commonly this resulted in delays to the original timelines, as project teams adapted their plans. By the end of the first year, the majority of problems had been resolved.

This highlights the important role Comic Relief played in clearly signalling an openness to changes in the model of delivery. Both in their individual grant management relationships, and at learning events, an open attitude to sharing challenges and mistakes and adapting approaches enabled the projects to learn and develop. The following factors made projects more successful in meeting their delivery milestones:

- **Marketing, publicity and networking;** funded partners said that having a high community and/or sector profile had helped, encouraging referrals, strengthening partnerships and motivating boys and young men to engage. For some projects the marketing had been community facing with strong coverage on social media, TV and radio and in printed press. For others, marketing had been through networks, partner organisations and systems of support
- **Senior level buy-in** (from the main delivery organisation, and from any project partners); especially when there were challenges or delays, a senior “push” could reduce the risk of problems becoming protracted and could approve project redesign in time to put projects back on track
- **Adequate staff capacity;** some projects were affected quite early on by a lack of staff capacity, either because of staff shortages, problems recruiting or because they had underestimated the staffing levels needed or the scale of demand. Those that were financially or structurally able to quickly adapt their staffing model did better.

“The project has received significant media coverage. The Voice Newspaper ran an article on the project entitled ‘Young, Gifted and Black’. That’s TV Manchester also ran a feature on their TV channel”

Funded partner

The below factors emerged as recurring project delivery challenges:

- Having co-production or a peer mentor/trainer recruitment and training phases before the start of other work made some projects reliant on successful recruitment of boys and young men to these phases. If this was difficult, delays could follow
- Problems with partnerships were a cause of delay or project re-design in several cases. If projects were reliant on the referral behaviour of other agencies, this could cause challenges to the engagement of boys and young men (see below) and contribute to project delays
- Some projects report dealing with higher-than-expected levels of need and risk. This includes high levels of risk from knife and gun violence or poor system-wide responses to boys' and young men's need. The increased staff time needed to manage and mitigate these risks has delayed project delivery at times
- Recruitment problems or staff absence; the staffing concerns encountered varied but failing to recruit in a timely way was a common issue in the first year. The projects often required a specific skill set or were looking for staff who reflected the boys and young men. This narrowed the pool of potential employees, volunteers or sessional staff, or pushed up salary costs
- Boys and young men having a suspicion of "outsiders" and then being reluctant to engage with partner organisations such as external evaluators or clinicians.

## Measuring outcomes achieved through the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme

The projects aimed to achieve positive outcomes for around 15,000 boys and young men over three years. By the close of year two, “Thriving Not Just Surviving” projects had reported positive outcomes for over 11,000 young people, the majority of whom were young men and boys, meaning that the programme was forecast to reach more young men and boys than expected.

Some projects also reached young people who identified as young women or girls, or who identified their gender in another way. The programme’s approach to providing male only spaces was discussed in the last chapter.

Some funded partners had challenges with delivery or reach, and these were explored in the previous chapter. Some of these were difficulties with attracting referrals, whether from boys and young men themselves, or from partner agencies. In other cases, there had been a delay to the project start as models of delivery were adapted to emerging learning. Some projects were just at the point of escalating reach when the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted their delivery.

### Outcome evaluation approaches

Each funded partner of the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” programme designed and delivered their own impact evaluations, based on their individual intended outcomes. In the second year of the programme several of the projects commented on the challenge of measuring outcomes with young men and boys; with models of delivery shifting substantially and young men and boys engaging differently over the course of the project, it could be difficult to reach critical volumes of outcomes data.

The table overleaf shows the extent to which the funded partners were able to quantitatively evidence impact of the main programme outcomes identified at the time that this report was collated (while project delivery is still ongoing). Only outcomes that feature in the “Thriving Not Just Surviving” logic model (see appendix 1) are explored here. The middle column shows which funded partners were gathering data about the outcome. The right-hand column shows how many of these funded partners had been able to demonstrate evidence of improvement.

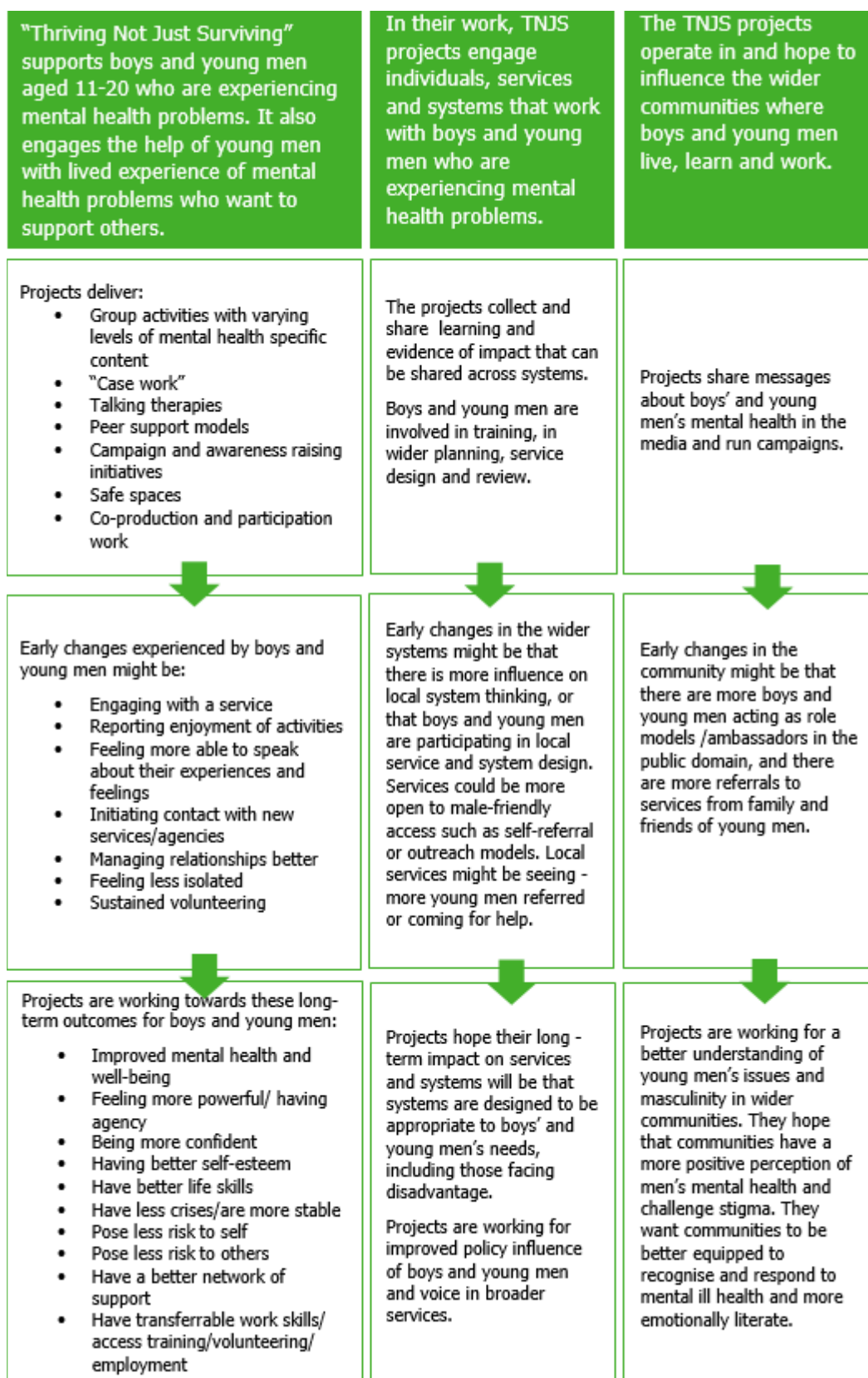


Outcome	Number of funded partners measuring this outcome in their evaluation	Number of funded partners showing good evidence of improvement
1. Improved mental health and wellbeing	15	12
2. Feeling more powerful/ having agency	0	0
3. Being more confident	5	4
4. Better self-esteem	2	1
5. Better life skills	1	1
6. Have less crises/being more stable	1	0
7. Pose less risk to self	0	0
8. Pose less risk to others	1	0
9. Have a better network of support	13	9
10. Have transferrable work skills/ access training/ volunteering/ employment	1	0
11. Influence services and systems to be more suited to boys and young men's needs	7	4
12. Boys and young men have improved policy influence in broader services	2	2
13. There is better understanding of young men's issues and masculinity in wider communities	0	0

This shows that the greatest available evidence of impact that the funded partners shared showed improvements in general, mental health and wellbeing, and in connectedness to formal and informal networks of support.

Comic Relief intends to review outcomes achieved across the programme, when Thriving Not Just Surviving comes to an end in late 2021.

## Appendix 1: The “Thriving Not Just Surviving Logic Model



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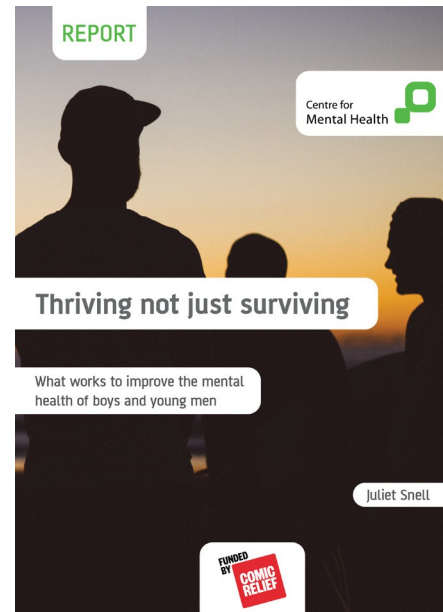
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## Thriving not just surviving

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