



SCOTCH WHISKY
ACTION FUND

MANAGED BY



WEST
DUNBARTONSHIRE
CVS



@ScotchWhiskySWA

Organisation: **West Dunbartonshire CVS**

Date of Award: **2018, 2020**

Amount Awarded: **£13,279**

Project Name: **Men's Briefing Project**



West Dunbartonshire CVS was established as part of a Scottish Government initiative to develop the role of local communities, and the third sector, to focus on issues of volunteer development, community planning, voluntary organisation development, and building local relationships. West Dunbartonshire has a population of nearly 90,000 including 7,066 over the age of 75. The area has one of the highest rates of alcohol related harm in Scotland, evidenced by primary care usage and emergency hospital admissions. The CVS was also recording an increase in the number of men referred to their befriending service due to concerns such as, loss of a partner, family having moved away, forced retirement due to declining health, and isolation. In 40% of these referrals, concerns had been noted around levels of alcohol use.

Men's Befriending Project: The Pilot Phase

In 2018, West Dunbartonshire CVS received a grant of £9,294 from the Scotch Whisky Action Fund (SWAF) to pilot a new men's befriending group following the noted increase in male referrals for its over 60s one-to-one befriending service: from GPs, health professionals, social work services, and even dentists. However, the one-to-one nature of traditional befriending didn't appeal to everyone and after consultation many said they would feel more comfortable in a small group setting instead. West Dunbartonshire CVS therefore received a grant to launch and deliver a new befriending group for men aged 50-80 years old to reduce isolation, build resilience, and reduce the risk of alcohol misuse. The grant specifically contributed to room hire at the local community centre, travel expenses for volunteer group leaders, a weekly lunch, staff coordination time, publicity, and activity materials.

The befriending group provided a weekly 3-4 hour opportunity for older men at risk of or experiencing loneliness and potentially misusing alcohol as a coping mechanism, to come together, make new friends, and get out the house. The group was managed by three trained male befrienders and the groups took place in three blocks of ten weeks for up to twelve participants each week.

Each session commenced with a 'getting to know you' introduction and ended with a friendship lunch. During the introduction session, participants were encouraged to choose from a range of activities which they thought would be of interest. Whilst there were different experiences and interests in the group, there was a general openness to engage in a range of activities including physical activity such as Levensgrove Park Heritage Walk; group outings to Denny Tank Museum and Glasgow Riverside Transport Museum; learning new skills including

portrait photography sessions; socialising as a group attending football matches at Dunbarton Football Club, and healthy eating.

By the end of the three, ten, week blocks they had engaged with thirty participants in total which helped to secure positive outcomes and blossoming friendships. Referrals were received from a range of sources including Sheltered Housing (5), Carers Service (6), GPs (10), OTs (4), and family and self-referral (5) and all were new to the service. The funding was vital in giving the breathing space required to develop and embed the initiative, allowing members to grow at their own pace, and gradually move from passive to active participants.

At the end of the ten week block the men had the opportunity to continue attending the group, move on to one-to-one befriending, or decide to move into volunteering or another community activity. All participants were asked to provide their initial baseline wellbeing via an outcome star and asked to again complete at the end of the ten week block. In all cases, participants recorded improvement. 80% of participants recorded improvement in three or more distinct categories with eleven noting a reduction in alcohol intake/desire over the period.

The project set out to achieve the intended outcomes:

- Men will experience reduced isolation and loneliness and increased personal resilience (monitored by a wellbeing wheel analysis throughout engagement with the project).
- Men will access increased meaningful activity leading to reduced incidences of alcohol-related harm (monitored by wellbeing wheel analysis throughout engagement with the project).

Case Study

Andy was referred by the occupational health service after losing his wife in late 2017 and has been having difficulty adjusting to living alone. He lives with chronic arthritis and attends the GP surgery regularly but was showing signs of deterioration and poor self-care. Most of his social activity in the past had been with his wife and he had struggled to make connections on his own.

Shy and reluctant to engage with the befriending group at first, he stated he had come along to keep everyone 'off his back' and to find out what it was all about. He attended the first session but failed to attend session 2. When contacted by staff to check on him, he was grateful for the call and explained his arthritis had been bad and he didn't want to walk far that day.

Staff re-assured him they would provide transport for him if that was the case and he agreed to attend on week 3.

When he returned to the group, he felt able to share his condition with the group and one of the other participants who lived close-by generously offered to pick him up and bring him along in the future joking "now we'll both have to turn up".

Andy revealed a previous interest in football and photography. He immersed himself in the sessions on the history of photography and portrait photography and lighting, and when he attended one of the outings to watch a football match, he said this was the first match he had been to since he was a boy; not only did he continue to attend with the group, he and another group member are now considering buying season tickets and going along to the football together.

In his outcome star review Andy stated he felt he had made most progress in meaningful activity, self-care, and relationships and said, "thank you for giving me this chance. It's been a great experience and has helped me see there are still things to do and places to see."

Men's Befriending Project: Post Pilot

Following a very successful pilot phase helping to build a strong foundation across the three blocks, staff explored options with the group on how to progress beyond the year of the initial award and were delighted members wanted the group to continue. Not only did they want it to continue, but they were also willing to take more of a lead, including exploring the setting up of a community organisation to drive the project further in the future. This was a major success for the group and reflected a positive journey for the core members from reluctance to wanting to lead for others further highlighting the level of impact the pilot project had in building confidence in the men involved. However, even though the members were assured of the CVS staff continued support, there was some concern they would need a short period of support to help bridge the gap between being managed to an independent group in the very early phase.

SWAF therefore awarded a further grant of £3,985 in 2019 to continue to support the project for an initial six month period to ensure a smooth handover while the group became established in their own right.

The project was disrupted with the pandemic and held back the process of establishing an independent group. However, it gave the staff time to work with the members to ensure they were confident in their new roles and providing a means to reach out to members during lockdown.

Throughout the period of lockdown, the members maintained a calling circle, keeping in touch by telephone and video call at least twice per week. Respecting the Covid rules, and when possible, the group moved planned indoor activities to outdoor ones to reduce risk but ensure the group maintained contact and provided support to each other. This was particularly important when several of the group members caught Covid themselves and were able to receive deliveries and calls from other members. In hindsight, setting up the befriending group in 2019 was perfectly timed as the men now had a friendship group they could rely on for support during this difficult time.

Case Study

Richard had been supporting his terminally ill parent. This is a stressful event at any time, but the situation was exacerbated by the ill-health of his partner's surviving parent also. Not wanting to over-burden his partner, Richard turned to the group for support; something which he would not have had the opportunity to do before the group formed as he had no regular friendships to turn to. Group members called Richard regularly just to check in and allow the chance to release and made offers of support around getting shopping and doing errands. When Richard's parent died, group members met up with him in person, appropriately socially distanced, to offer condolences and just allow him the chance to grieve in a supportive environment. Richard said "I don't know what I would have done without the group. It gave me support just for me and allowed my wife to focus her attention on her dad, without worrying too much about me."

Men's Befriending Project: Post Pilot

The 18 month support from SWAF, and the total investment of £13,279, allowed the group the chance to build confidence and move to their end goal of becoming an independent community organisation, which they have now achieved. They have developed clear goals around growing membership, increasing their range of activities, and raising awareness of male isolation issues across West Dunbartonshire. As part of this process the group have secured continuation funding from the Scottish Government Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund and are looking forward to joining the awardees network.

"We are incredibly grateful to SWAF for its funding and support, the Men Befriending project has the capacity to be a really positive addition to the lives of men across West Dunbartonshire. Funding is so important to help innovative projects get off the ground and SWAF were willing to take a chance on something we believed would work well. This would not have been possible without the generous support of SWAF" – Selina Ross, Chief Officer

"its opened my eyes that there are other ways to engage with people than the local

"I would never have thought that there were so many things I could get involved with, but this has helped to open my eyes and given me a new spring in my step"

"thank you for all your support I am looking forward to the mornings more than I have in ages"

*all names have been changed throughout this report to protect the identities of the individuals and their families