

Short Black n Sides

Talking Mental Health in Barbershops

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Foreword

Community Partnerships within Sandwell Council support the community and voluntary sector to develop and deliver services and supports for local communities. We support coproductive practices and work with the voluntary sector to strengthen our communities and design services and supports according to priorities and need within the community. One of the areas that I was keen to support and further understand is the experience of men from minority ethnic communities in relation to their mental health, knowing that this is an area that is not openly talked about, and aware of how suicide is a significant concern within such communities.

Different communities understand and talk about mental health in different ways. In some communities, mental health problems are rarely spoken about and can be seen in a negative light. This can discourage people within the community from talking about their mental health and may be a barrier to engagement with health services (Mental Health Foundation).

Having strong and supportive social connections and positive relationships with family and friends is crucial. Having someone to talk to, a safe space and a simple 'how are you' can open the conversation. Listening, and being open and understanding, can help those at risk by letting them know it is okay for them to share.

For many people, particularly men and those from ethnic minority communities, there can be a stigma surrounding mental health issues. It can feel uncomfortable and difficult to talk about, and that's why Short Black n Sides is an amazing project providing low level mental health support as well as being culturally sensitive, and something I was keen to invest in. It recognises the stigma but also the simplicity of understanding the relationship with barbers, that they are safe and trusted spaces for many and a space to socialise and to talk, a place where men do open up.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Changing Our Lives. It has been a pleasure working with them and seeing their passion and commitment in coproducing this project and listening to the powerful stories taking place in the barbershops and, more importantly, listening to some of the positive outcomes. I am keen to see this project evolve and see more safe spaces being nurtured in a similar way.

Manny Sehmbi, Business Manager – Community Partnerships, SMBC

Changing Our Lives

What we do

Changing Our Lives is a rights-based organisation, so human rights underpin everything that we do. We work in coproduction with disabled people and people with lived experience of mental health difficulties, of all ages, as equal partners to find solutions to social injustice and health inequality.

All of our work is rooted in the belief that no one is too disabled and no one's mental health is too complex to lead an 'ordinary life'. Our approach rests firmly on the social model of disability. As such, we don't believe people's lives should be limited or defined by labels and diagnoses and we are committed to reframing how society views mental health and disability.

At Changing Our Lives, we focus on finding solutions and achieving outcomes that result in equality and social justice. We don't deliver set 'services', we think of outcomes first and then work in coproduction with individuals and communities to think about what needs to be done to achieve that outcome and take it from there. It is through this approach that we gather rich learning and empower people to have more control over the things that matter to them.

The origins of Short Black n Sides

Short Black n Sides emerged as a result of numerous conversations with Sandwell Mental Health Peoples Parliament around inequalities faced by men from Black and Asian communities within the mental health system. This was further supported by anecdotal evidence through the stories of a number of individuals that the Parliament and Changing Our Lives have worked with in the borough.

Acknowledgements

Changing Our Lives would like to thank all the barbershops involved in the project for their time, ideas, trust in the approach and willingness to trailblaze; the men from Sandwell who kindly shared their honesty, passion, and real life stories as part of the project; Sandwell College, and their photography students for their enthusiasm, commitment and powerful imagery; and Manny Sehmbi, Community Partnerships, SMBC for her drive and belief in coproduction and innovation and her unwavering support.

Lucy Dunstan – Deputy CEO, Changing Our Lives



Introduction to the project

The need for the barbershop and the importance it has to the Black community is historical. For much of world history, minority groups had no access to means of communication. The problems that were discussed on the national news or newspapers were of a certain group, of a certain class, of a certain gender.

Throughout history, it is at the barbershop that Black men's problems have been articulated, solutions explored and narratives about events in society constructed. This is what makes it a safe space to chat and the perfect place to start conversations about mental health.

Short Black n Sides is an innovative pilot project providing a platform for men from Black and Asian communities to talk about, normalise and challenge the stigma surrounding mental health in their own communities. It is through an understanding and appreciation of the historical legacy of the barbershop that this project has been shaped. The project's foundation was about taking the message to where men meet, socialise and feel relaxed.

The relationship between barber and customer is a loyal one, and cuts, fades and shapes can happen as often as once a week or fortnight. This means many men see their barber more frequently than they see their friends, GP and members of their own family. Who else better, to recognise changes in a person's mood or outlook on life than their barber?

As the barber/customer relationship develops over time, people naturally tend to open up more and warning signs around fluctuating mental health can be far more easily noticed. Within a barbershop setting there is a lot of trust and intimacy as men are in a personal space with their barber, allowing them to touch their head, ears and neck, not something many men would ordinarily allow to happen away from a barbershop environment.

The rationale behind the project

Men's relationship with mental health can be a challenging one. Asking for help can be hard and men often feel intense pressure to maintain an exterior of control and may view asking for help, or even talking about feelings as a sign of weakness.

At a societal level, there is stigma attached to mental health. However, within Black and Asian communities there is often a deeper mistrust and unease, reinforced by a belief that talking about feelings and emotions can be interpreted as a flaw. Until these myths and misconceptions are challenged and mental health achieves parity of esteem with physical health it will continue to be an issue that isn't talked about by friends, families, neighbours and wider communities. It is this wider school of thought that needs to educate local communities through the use of fresh and innovative approaches driven at the heart of those communities.

What did we want to achieve?

Short Black n Sides had 4 key aims:

- to support males from Black and Asian communities to stay well and normalise mental health by having conversations in barbershops with people they can identify with, to talk about their day to day issues and how they are feeling.
- to build safe and resilient communities where mental health is seen as everyone's responsibility and communities take ownership, developing their own solutions that become embedded, enabling them to be self-sustaining.
- to consider an arts based approach to the work and use 'the arts' to promote storytelling, challenge communities, build confidence, spread awareness and positive, powerful messages and images around mental health.
- to encourage men to speak to somebody they trust about how they are feeling as early as possible, to prevent symptoms deteriorating unnecessarily.



UK based research shows that the experience of Black men in the mental health system is disproportionately negative.

Black men are:

- **3 times** more likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospital than the population as a whole.
- **40 - 60%** more likely to be admitted hospital via the criminal justice system.
- **Twice** as likely to be detained under section 136 MHA (2007)

(Social Justice Mental Health: Poverty, Ethnicity and Family Breakdown Interim Policy Briefing, Centre for Social Justice 2011)



The risk of psychosis in Black Caribbean groups is estimated to be nearly **seven times higher** than in the White population.

Detention rates under the Mental Health Act during 2017/18 were **four times higher** for Black people than White people.

(NHS Digital (9 Oct 2018) Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures 2017-18)

(Fearon P., Kirkbride J.B., Morgan C. et al. (2006) Incidence of schizophrenia and other psychoses in ethnic minority groups: results from the MRC AESOP Study. Psychological Medicine, 36(11), 1541-1550)

In the UK, men are **three times** more likely to take their own lives than women.

In the UK, the highest suicide rate was for men aged 45-49 and the biggest cause of death for young men aged 25-45 is suicide.

There were **5,821** recorded suicides registered in the UK in 2017.

(Mental Health Foundation 2019)

A number of factors, including **poverty, stigma and racism**, may explain the differences in these experiences. It may also be because **mainstream mental health services** often fail to understand or provide support that is **reflective and representative** of the **diverse** populous that they serve.

The Sandwell experience and national drivers

Short Black n Sides emerged in Sandwell, a metropolitan borough of the West Midlands, near Birmingham. With a population of **309,000**, Sandwell is made up of six towns, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury, and West Bromwich. **30.1%** of Sandwell's population are from minority ethnic communities, significantly higher than the national average of **14%**. Of the 6 towns, Smethwick has the highest proportion of residents from these communities, making up **62.1%** of the town's population, with West Bromwich second with a **40.9%** population. Informed by the demographic data from the Census (2011), Changing Our Lives concentrated the project in Smethwick and West Bromwich.

Short Black n Sides is informed and underpinned by recent national, regional and local policy. Each of the policies were developed to respond strategically and operationally to the growing rates of people experiencing mental health difficulties, improve current models of care and support, develop universal and community based supports and encourage happy and healthy communities within the borough of Sandwell and beyond as early as possible, to prevent symptoms deteriorating unnecessarily.

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Our Approach

All of our work is rooted in community development, as we know from experience that local people and communities are best placed to find solutions to local problems. Coproduction underpins our entire approach and at its heart, it is a simple idea. It's about individuals, communities and organisations having the skills, knowledge and ability to work together, create opportunities and solve problems.

Often people from minority ethnic communities are labelled by professionals as 'hard to reach'. The inference is that the challenges of engagement are located within communities and their resistance to engage, rather than with the professionals and their ability to reach out to communities. As such, the perceived problem is rooted in the barriers created by people themselves. Changing Our Lives challenges this belief through value based practice underpinned by human rights, a commitment to coproduction and responsive community connecting. Because of this, we stand alongside people who are seldom heard, and work together on projects that have a meaningful and impactful outcome.



Using this approach, we developed relationships with individuals who had wide reaching formal and informal networks. People with lived experience of mental health difficulties, barbershop owners and workers, youth workers, health workers, community leaders, arts led organisations, educators and other members of these communities were all an intrinsic part of the project team. Their local knowledge, connections and experiences built the strong foundations of Short Black n Sides.



Our detached community development approach has proven an effective methodology in engaging with men and building trust to gently move them from feelings of initial reluctance and scepticism to an outlook of confidence, self-determination and resilience. Throughout the project we were committed to having conversations with men on their own territory and at the times and places where they felt most relaxed and at home. The success of this approach requires it to be authentic, requiring flexibility, creativity, boldness and exceptional interpersonal skills.

Building a team around the project, establishing and nurturing relationships and the collection and analysis of local knowledge forms the basis of any project that Changing Our Lives leads. Our work is evidence based, and is coproduced at all stages. This approach is not fast paced and neither is it necessarily sequential. By its very definition, Short Black n Sides evolved, with a series of planned and targeted approaches coupled with some rather wonderful unplanned for opportunities that resulted in the project moving into uncharted areas. This pliable way of working is rooted in Changing Our Lives' value base of bravery, risk taking and putting people first.



Changing Our Lives believe that the arts can effectively promote, illustrate and showcase individual, community and wider expression. In addition, an arts based approach can offer a complimentary visual language, with an appreciation of the power invested in the need to tell stories. It can have a much wider reach than traditional engagement and participation.

Whilst building relationships with the barbers in the initial phase of the project, it became clear that each of the barbers were very proud of their business. They were keen to showcase their barbershop, and spoke with affection about it, how long they had served their communities and what changes they had seen in the community over time.

Using established networks with creative partners within the local communities, a relationship was developed with students of photography who used their skills to capture the unique aspects of the barbershops visually, creating a bank of images to illustrate the project, serving as an archive and a lasting visual record for the barbershops themselves. These images can be used as a tool to further the conversation about mental health in the barbershops amongst customers and staff, furthering the message of Short Black n Sides.

Images from the barbershops were also used to create eye catching postcards. These useful cards reflect the historical importance of the barbershop and the principles and aims of the project – to reduce stigma and encourage Black and Asian men to seek support and talk about mental health.



What We Did

Recruiting barbers – they choose us!

It was crucial to quickly build a rapport and gain trust with barbers and other men in the barbershops. Although immensely time consuming, there is no substitute for walking the streets of a community and using your senses to begin to understand it's unique offerings. We know from experience that this is the most effective way of reaching the right people, dropping into every Black and Asian owned barbershop we encountered. Numerous hours were devoted to selling the vision, negotiating and persuading barbers to believe in it and learn together as we go. Three barbers were selected for the pilot.

- Shabz Barbers, Cape Hill
- Hibiscus Barbers, West Bromwich
- Waterloo Barbers, Smethwick



Hanging out in barbershops - a part of the furniture!

By simply talking and listening Short Black n Sides created an environment of mutual support, humour and advice, all key ingredients of the Black and Asian barbershop experience. Without a booking system, barbers did not rush their customers, some men were visiting just to pass time, and not for a haircut and others helped themselves to a drink and hung out in the shop for hours. What was obvious after spending time absorbing the day to day happenings of the shops was the trusting relationship customers had with their barber. Being able to talk freely, in a non-judgmental open way is intrinsic to the relationship, and barbers talked openly about how they worked hard at maintaining the sanctity of the space, by not discussing issues about other customers and always letting the customer lead the conversation.

"See this guy (referring to the barber) I trust him. I have known him for 25 years, I grew up with him. I know if I tell him my business, I know he is not going to pass it around. It's like an unwritten rule, isn't it? I can tell him this and that about my family, my job, and anything. He listens and nods a bit and I know he is a trustful man. Yeah, barbers are like counsellors."

Customer

This trusted, reciprocal relationship was recognised by barbers too and they spoke about the importance of not chatting about other people's business.

"People tell you their life stories. It's like they have a trust with you, and they trust that you will not tell anyone else. They know they can tell me something and I won't tell anyone. I have people coming here 15 and 16 years and they talk because they trust me. Some people talk about their family problems and that is between me and them. My job is not to go and tell the whole of Cape Hill their business."

Barber

"When they talk I say to them, don't worry, it will be okay. It is not the end of your life. Some people get suicidal, you know. So my job is to say to them, keep going my friend, it will get better. You have to be very careful, because some men, if their wife has left, they feel so down, and depressed that they could. Women too - who bring in their kids for a haircut, they talk to me about their problems. People often ask for my advice, I always tell them, don't worry, just because she has left doesn't mean your life has ended. You may find happiness again."

Barber

Starting conversations about mental health is not easy, and we were conscious of being reflective and respectful of the rhythm and atmosphere of each shop. We found that the dynamics of a barbershop continually change, depending on the barbers cutting and customer being cut on any given day. This meant we had to be adaptable and 'chameleon' like to fit in, being conscious that we blended in to their rhythm. For example, some barbershops played loud music, multiple conversations were happening and there was a real buzz and energy. Other barbershops were very quiet, with the barber focusing exclusively on the haircut, and we encountered everything in between. This presented a challenge, however, by being tenacious and bold, we were able to find opportunities to sow the seeds, and cultivate conversations to grow at their pace. This often resulted in both barbers and customers exploring mental health from an individual, family and community perspective.

"I remember a young boy who came in and I have been cutting his hair for years. He told me about grief he was having with other boys and he told me he was dealing with it. But I knew by the way he was talking that he was not dealing with it. I knew this boy from a little kid. I know his father and his family. The way this kid was talking was not himself. He was telling me he was doing 'this and that' to sort it. But I could tell it was having a big effect on him. So I said to him, go and talk to your Dad about it. You sound stressed. Tell your Dad. The next week, his Dad came into the shop and he said thanks because you have helped my son. He talked to me about the situation, and we have talked and he is getting some help now."

That made me feel good."

Barber

*"My brother had really bad depression and he didn't tell anyone until he was about 18. You know he suffered all the way through school, feeling like sh*t and not telling anyone. It was when he went to college and got some really good mates and one boy actually told my brother that he had depression himself and had been to see a counsellor. Only because P was honest about himself and how he was feeling, only then did my brother say that he felt like that too. He saw a counsellor at college and they were really good. My Mum and Dad saw them too. I am grateful to P because only he was able to be honest and that helped my brother. He has got a family now and is doing good. That does make me realise that you really do need to tell someone before it's too late."*

Customer

During conversations in the barbershops, we used statistics as an aid to talk about the 'real men' behind the data. The sobering realisation that suicide is the biggest cause of death in young men, provoked them to talk about emotions, masculinity and the sanctuary of the barbershops. When asked about his thoughts on the statistics relating to suicide, one young man said:

"No man, as Muslims we don't talk about that here. It's a shame for the family. If someone takes their life we say, no, it's not your life to take, it's God's life. You shouldn't have done that."

When asked how these families cope when someone has taken their own life? He replied,

"Well, they just can't tell people, or say it was an accident and God took him. They don't want anyone to know they did it themselves. It's a secret and it's hard to keep secrets isn't it."

Customer

"It is a national tragedy all the young men dying. What can be so bad that you think that's the only way out? Makes my heart heavy thinking about the kids with no one to speak to, not talking or getting help. All those families left empty and without their kids. Sad. Really sad."

Customer

"It's very sad, terrible. It's a life that is lost and that was full of promise. People must feel trapped to decide to something extreme and there is no way back from it. Families may feel lost and they have to live with that forever. I know a friend's brother took his life many years ago and he and his family was just broken, I can still see his Dad's face now - just a totally broken man."

Customer

Sometimes conversations were more successful if there were less men in the shop, as customers seemed to feel more comfortable joining in conversations in smaller groups, or even on a one-to-one basis. Our approach meant that we visited the barbershops at varying times and to suit the barbers. As a result, this meant business as usual for barbershops and it gave us the opportunity to have conversations with people visiting at different times.

"When you leave school, you leave a lot of support. You are expected to just get on with it, be an adult. We are told all this macho crap about being a man 'man up' and that if you have a mental health problem, you might be flawed. No matter what people say about we are all equal, we are not really, are we? Because people judge others all the time."

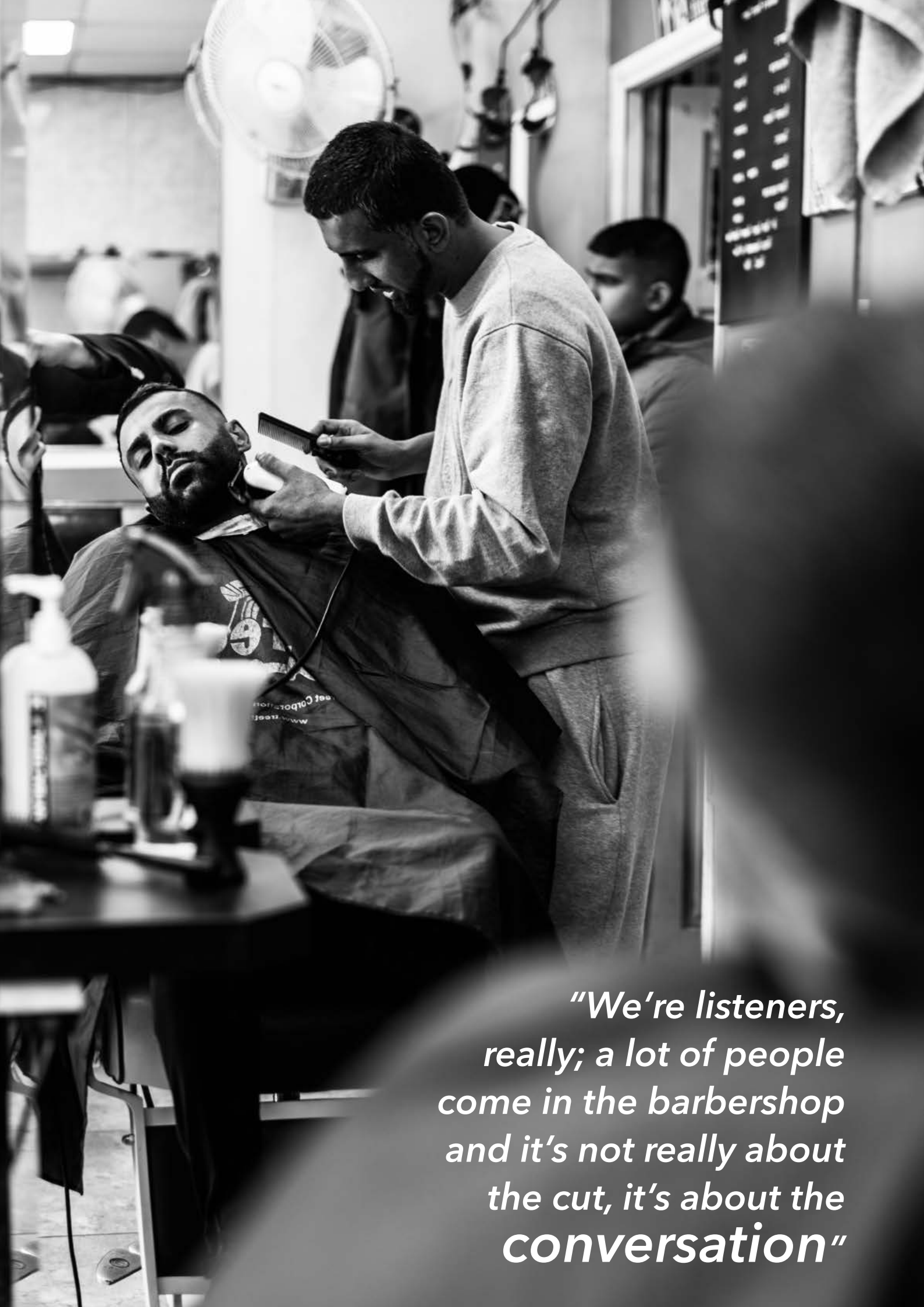
Young customer



Many men spoke about the challenges in opening up, talking about mental health and acknowledged a reluctance in many men to speak about feelings and emotion, fearful that this may be interpreted as weakness.

"I think it's hard now. So many men have problems with their marriage and problems at home and this can make them feel desperate. The culture is different between here and Africa. It can be a struggle to come to terms with the differences. My heart is in Zimbabwe, but my body is here. I do feel stressed by life sometimes. I can just come here and talk to my friend here."

Customer



***"We're listeners,
really; a lot of people
come in the barbershop
and it's not really about
the cut, it's about the
conversation"***

Ensuring a legacy for the project

The legacy of this pilot is an essential element. To ensure the essence of the unique relationship between barber and customer continued after the lifetime of the 15-month pilot, we created a relationship with Sandwell College and the Level 2 Barbering Skills course Curriculum Lead. Over three sessions, 55 students were trained in basic mental health awareness and the skills to build their confidence to have difficult conversations. Some of the students currently work in barbershops across Sandwell, and during the session recognised the signs and symptoms of common mental health difficulties in some of their current customers.

The key message to the students was that active listening is a powerful and essential skill and that a simple conversation about how someone is feeling can have a significant impact on their well-being. The significance and impact of this preventative approach was evidenced throughout the conversations held within the barbershops with professional barbers and customers alike. We want barbers of the future to feel comfortable having 'uncomfortable conversations' as they move into the busy and thriving world of the barbershop.



"It was excellent, refreshing especially as I have done a mental health course myself. It is a sensitive topic, and some students were getting a bit agitated, but after a while they relaxed into it. I think the students were really open and they listened well and focussed. As barbering tutors, we are dealing with mental health every day, I have students who I worry about. I see it all the time out there. It's been so beneficial, an eye opener for the students. The delivery was brilliant. Delivered really well, absolutely clear and understandable – just what was needed."

Tutor, Sandwell College

The Arts

Using our established relationship with a local arts organisation, Multistory, Changing Our Lives was invited to submit the images captured by the photography students to the first [‘BLAST! Festival of Photography’](#) in the borough. This innovative festival and accompanying workshops celebrated photography and the work of local, national and internationally renowned photographers.

The Short Black n Sides multi-media exhibition featured an original barber's chair from the 1980's acquired from Hibiscus Barbers and a barbers red and white traditional pole, designed by one of the students. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to sit in the chair, view a digital exhibition of over 120 images whilst listening to an audio recording of the sounds of Shabz Barbers, featuring the owner talk about the history of his Cape Hill shop, with customers and barbers joining in with their stories.



"A really rich idea that engaged students giving them the opportunity to go above and beyond a standard college assignment. It gave the students a fantastic CV entry and educated them into wider issues some may have not been aware of or even considered. It also produced a very strong set of work that was able to be shown to a wider audience and concluded by being part of a very prestigious inaugural photographic festival for the benefit of the Sandwell and wider arts communities. In simple terms it was a most enjoyable and rich project that we engaged in with Changing Our Lives and we thank you for the opportunity as well as your passion and proactive drive to keep it real and live."

Team Leader Photo Imaging,
Sandwell College

Conversations with the wider community

Following the BLAST! Festival, the digital exhibition was used as a tool to have conversations with the wider community. During the week of World Mental Health Day, October 2019, the exhibition was shown at West Bromwich Central Library. The exhibition also accompanied by resources and helpful information about mental health and well-being, as well as opportunities for members of the public to talk openly about mental health to the Changing Our Lives team. The images from the exhibition proved an effective way of provoking thought and encouraging local people to chat about their own personal experiences and as a result a number of people were signposted to local mental health services.

At different stages of the project, key information was created and shared with the barbers, their customers and the barbering students. This included eye catching postcards about the project and a pocket sized essential guide offering top tips to well-being. The pocket sized guide was designed to be discreet and barbers were encouraged to slip them to their customers at their own discretion.



Successes and outcomes



Reaching the right people

The application of a tried and tested detached community development approach enabled local Black and Asian men to take ownership on their own turf, where they felt most comfortable and in control. By engaging with them at a grass roots level, in spaces that were their own, conversations were crafted and shaped that would not have happened in other, more formal settings.

Of course, a lot of this unsung work is already going on in the barbershops. Getting barbers to realise the significance and the impact of the simplicity of conversations about mental health was the power and beauty of the project – the barbers that chose to join us recognised that the everyday untold stories that they heard needed to be celebrated, shared with others and, they believed with passion, that they could be used to help other men. Changing Our Lives' job was to nurture this great work, and equip barbers with additional skills, knowledge and the support and assurance to carry on the conversations that were already happening. This low level wellbeing work has a significant preventative benefit and was an understated yet impactful method of engaging Black and Asian men.

"When you have people who keep things inside themselves and not sharing it, they are the ones who get really depressed. You have to ask people how are you doing?"

We have an Indian man who comes in regularly for a shave. He is always happy and chatting to us. Then one day he came in and just sat quietly. I asked him if he was ok as he looked tired and stressed out and then he told me 'no, I am not doing so good as my wife has left me and we had to sell the house.' He sat here for half an hour and he actually talked to me about it all. I tried to say to him, 'look man, these things happen. This is life. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't'. I think we helped him, by just sitting and letting him talk. All you can do is just listen, and tell the guy not to worry. It is not the end of your life, but it can be the start of something new and good."

Barber

Mental Health – everyone's business

Many of us are reluctant to share our thoughts, feelings and emotions with others, for fear of our confidence being breached, and people getting to 'know our business.' As a result, we often keep this to ourselves and do not share with others, nor do we encourage others to share with us. This pilot has challenged that fear head on by confidently encouraging men to begin to explore mental health within their own communities, and to make connections with their own, and others' experiences.

Looking closely at the men behind the statistics gave customers and barbers freedom to reflect on the hurt and pain that mental health difficulties can cause people, families and communities. We are all affected by mental health, living and breathing it every day. The chance for Black and Asian men to think about its impact on their community has been extremely powerful.

The work of Short Black n Sides has equipped barbers with the knowledge, structure and context to feel confident about seeing themselves as part of the solution in supporting the wellbeing of Black and Asian men. As long as the barbershops exist, this will continue to be their invaluable offer.

Challenging stereotypes

Many of us can hold stereotypical and oppressive opinions about others, especially those who we see as different to ourselves. These can be views and assumptions about mental health, race, sexuality, religion, in fact any aspect of someone else's life.

The barbershop is a rite of passage. It's a place where boys become men. If you have ever been in a Black or Asian barbershop you will know that the rule is, there are no rules - what's said in the barbershop stays in the barbershop! It's a level playing field and nothing is off limits, so it's a place for debate about anything, often the unravelling of things that aren't spoken about at home or in the workplace. You will always get an audience to hear your views – whether that is a shop full of 'banterous' men or the solitary listening ear of your barber.

In such an informal setting, some initial conversations with men were peppered with words and phrases that could be considered offensive and rude. Rather than ignore this, and potentially reinforce stereotypes and attitudes, the Changing Our Lives team used their tenacity to challenge. The use of quizzical questioning, seeking alternative phrases from men and asking them directly about why they would choose to use specific words to describe other people's experiences resulted in open and honest conversations about where we get our views from and how our opinions are formed. This approach was successful due to the relationship that we developed with barbers, combined with the experience and value base of the Changing Our Lives team who draw on many years of working in this way to measuring when, how and what to challenge.

By normalising the language of mental health, exploring myths and assumptions, and challenging unfavourable stereotypes, the pilot opened up subjects for conversations that are often off limits in these communities.

To encourage men to speak to somebody they trust about how they are feeling as early as possible, to prevent symptoms deteriorating unnecessarily.

Barbers know their customers well, often forming a bond after years of loyalty to them. They have 'earned' the right, and through the pilot increased their knowledge and assurance to ask what's happening in their lives and genuinely listen to the answer. Through getting a positive response when talking about emotions for the first time, men know that they can trust the man who cuts their hair.



"In this place, we can talk about anything. Anything goes! If you want to tell me about the grief you are having with your missus, I can listen to you. I just say 'ok, good, yes' and let the man talk. He can tell me all sorts, but it stays with me."

Barber

The Barbershop is a permanent feature of the high street and presents one solution in offering low level mental health support for Black and Asian men in communities by communities. A remedy to isolation and mental health difficulties is happening in barber chairs across the country, as barbers are already doing the job of being effective listeners.

What Short Black n Sides has illustrated is the importance of recognising the value of the Barbershop as a place where men often feel most at home in their community and the significance that this plays in the future planning of targeted mental health support for Black and Asian communities. This requires a shift in thinking, to invest in a belief that communities can find solutions to their own challenges.

This is an investment in coproduction.



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