



Ready Friends Befriending Forum 22 April 2026

Rhiannon Williams, RVA's Ready Friends Coordinator, welcomed 41 participants, who attended the Befriending Forum from across Reading's community and statutory sectors.

Men's Loneliness

Programme:

1. Welcome, introductions and event outcomes
2. Presentations
 - Nagina Batool and Zahra Akhtar from Together for Mental Wellbeing
 - Stuart Freebody from Reading Men's Sheds
 - Andy Barton from Andy's Man Club, Theale
 - Helen Gray from Man V Fat Reading
3. Networking time
4. Small group workshop and feedback
5. Forthcoming training, updates, news etc

Outcomes expected from the event

- Heard from local services offering safe and inclusive spaces for men to socially connect, why this is important, and what all groups and services can do to be more inclusive and welcoming
- Reflected on what attendees took away from the presentations, workshop and discussions
- Briefed on events and training coming up
- Opportunity to network

Small groups session and feedback

Participants in 4 groups were asked to consider the following:

A. What issues and ideas in the presentations surprised or stood out for you and why?

Passion!

Transport to activities - distance and cost

Cost of activities when not free or low-cost

Unsure about the name Man v Fat, and the cost once the free sessions are over

The perception of 'laddish' images and descriptions could be inadvertently exclusionary for some men

Great idea to have an activity linked to weight loss

Good idea to have a Sweeper role, offering nervous people to 'walk through the door' with them





Andy's Man Club has a clear structure and explanation of the rules, which is helpful for neurodivergent people

Andy's Man Club uses a ball to pass around a circle of chairs (no tables) to enable men to speak

Reading Men's Shed has a sit-down informal break in each session, offering participants the opportunity to listen, share news, concerns etc

It's good to have a mix of volunteers

Optional pronoun badges can be helpful

Sport for men - hobby-as-community (same concept with Reading Men's Shed) - many men require an activity to connect over

The statistics on male suicide were surprising and shocking

Need for non-judgmental settings

B. How does your group or service ensure that all men feel welcome and safe to socially connect - whatever their community or identity?

Policies and procedures

A mix of groups on offer - garden, support, coffee

Men-only sessions

Breaking down stereotypes

Person-centred goals

Offering dignity and respect

In-person meet ups

Working with existing community leaders so you are culturally informed

Using familiar spaces

Collaborating with other organisations

C. What else could your group do to address men's loneliness and are there any challenges in doing this? What support could RVA offer your group with the challenges?

Hard to access men to raise awareness around falls prevention and the support available

Hard to get men in the door

Transport

Language support needed - RVA could promote translation services

RVA could encourage more male volunteers

Cost

Finding particular communities

Service open days/VCS fairs for the public to attend (eg Older Peoples' Day, Carers' Day)

WhatsApp group to communicate with groups





Outside '9-5' options for men.

Role models and mentors with experience.

Check-ins with individuals (esp those who have stopped attending)

Phrases such as *social isolation* and *loneliness* can be off-putting, due to the stigma. It's hard to find appealing alternatives.

Feedback from participants on this event

100% of participants reported that the event fully-met their expectations.

What did you find most useful?

Hearing that we are not alone and getting the message out!

Just finding out range of services and orgs for men

Presentations, networking and the group exercise generated some real nuggets and ideas!

Hearing others' perspectives on the challenges of supporting men more effectively

How can we improve the event?

More networking time

Nothing - very good!

More breaks/moving around during event please!

Sharing details of groups attending (emails etc)

Possible themes for future Befriending Forums

Young people gap in services for 24-30 year olds after No 5 or EHCP end what next

How marketing with those terms (loneliness, isolation) will push many away - how can we communicate in ways where people don't self-exclude

Difficulty making new friends as adults, putting yourself out there and how to make it easier

Date of next Befriending Forum - to be advised. Be the first to hear about news, events, training, resources for groups and practitioners, research and innovations from across UK - subscribe to **RVANews** from [this link](#)

