

A group of men are huddled together in a circle, embracing each other. The scene is lit with blue and orange lights, creating a warm and supportive atmosphere. The men are of various ages and are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire. The text "MAN UP" is overlaid in the center of the image.

MAN UP

By **RESTOKE**
.ORG.UK



INTRODUCTION

Restoke is a not-for-profit participatory performance company based in Stoke-on-Trent. Founded in 2009, Restoke works with people in the city to undertake artistic adventures that inspire social change. Projects are conceived and driven by Co-Artistic Directors Clare Reynolds and Paul Rogerson with support from a Core Team, Creative Team and Associate Artists.

In 2017, Restoke embarked upon Man Up, their sixth participatory performance project in Stoke-on-Trent. Man Up sought to address issues around mental health and masculinity in response to the alarming fact that the biggest killer of men under the age of 45 in the UK is suicide.

Restoke worked with men in Stoke-on-Trent over 9 months to turn their personal experiences and stories into a performance. The performance was developed and held in the Concert Room of Goldenhill Working Men's Club in Stoke-on-Trent in August 2018, and was seen by some 590 people across 5 shows.

This report is written by artist-researcher Nicola Winstanley, who followed the project from inception to performance and beyond, collecting and recording information that charts the journey of the men and artists involved, and is accompanied by visual documentation by artist Rob Pointon and photographer Jenny Harper.

FORWARD

“You don’t just invite people in to participate, you give them space and power to initiate. It’s about democracy. Instead of only ‘participation’ you can have protagonistic democracy where people come up with their own ideas and structures. It’s much stronger; it has potential to transform cartographies of power.” -Doreen Massey¹

As Restoke’s creative evaluator, I have found that there comes a point in a Restoke project report where I feel a slight pang of uneasiness in continuing to describe the people involved as ‘participants’. This is because, by a certain intangible stage in the process, a transformation happens; the power shifts from Restoke’s hands to theirs, they become protagonists rather than participants. Helpfully for me, during this project the transformation was marked definitively by the participants themselves when they decided to call themselves ‘The Up Men’, which is how I will refer to them from that point onwards.

The aim of this report is to open a window into Restoke’s methods of co-creation in a way that invites you to share in their learning; describing the processes, successes and challenges of tackling the difficult subject of mental health through participatory performing arts.

Nicola Winstanley, Artist-Researcher.



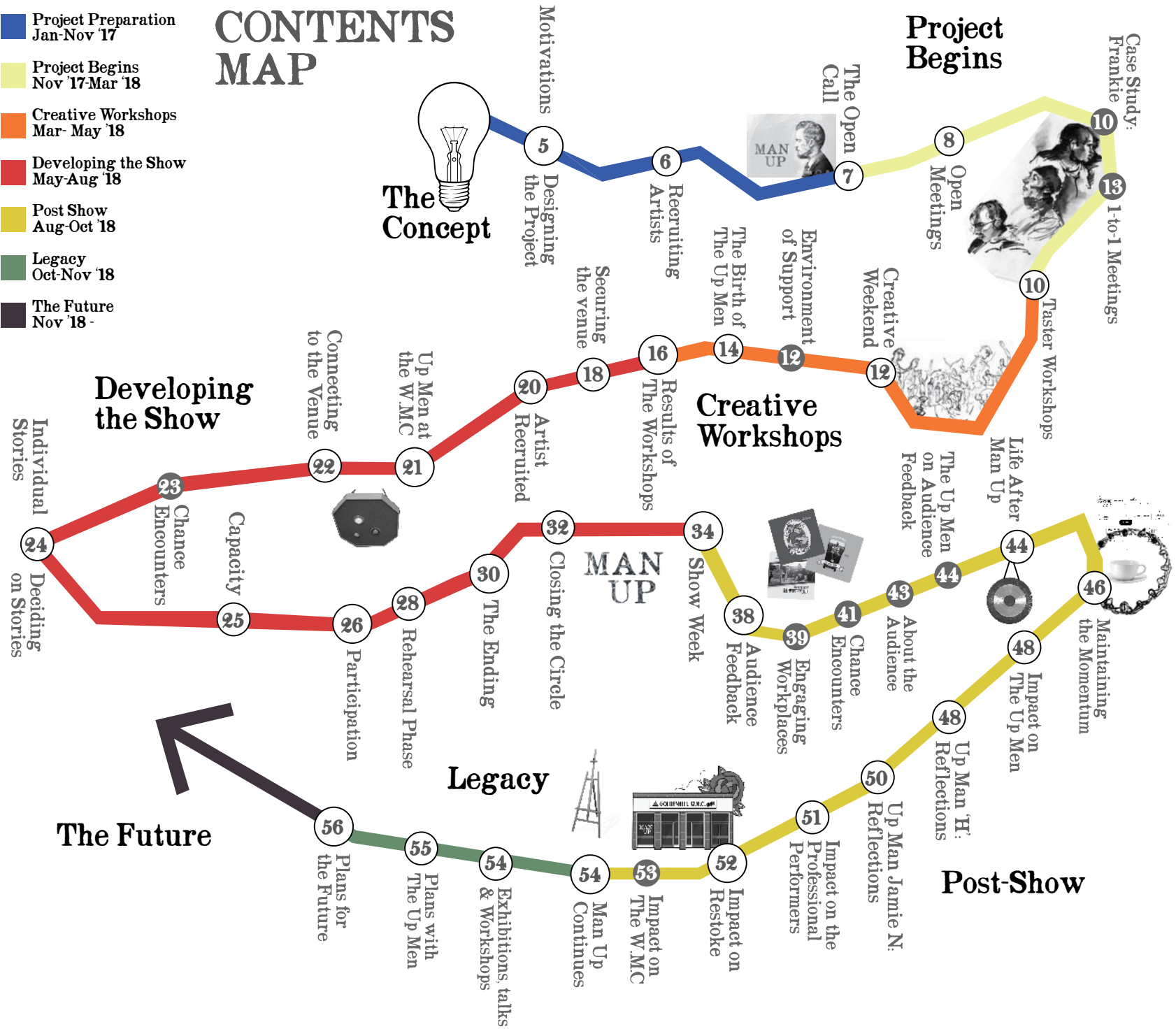
‘The Up Men’ 21 Portraits made between June and August 2018. Rob Pointon.

¹ The Revisualization Of The Social. Actors, Agents And Attendants Social Housing, Housing The Social: Art, Property And Spatial Justice, 2012, pg. 63



- Project Preparation
Jan-Nov '17
- Project Begins
Nov '17-Mar '18
- Creative Workshops
Mar- May '18
- Developing the Show
May-Aug '18
- Post Show
Aug-Oct '18
- Legacy
Oct-Nov '18
- The Future
Nov '18 -

CONTENTS MAP



When considering how to arrange this report it seemed disingenuous to portray the process as entirely linear and sequential. Undoubtedly there was a structured form to the project that steered the process through stages of exploration and development, and the report is arranged in a broadly time-linear fashion and can be read this way to achieve an impression of the overall narrative of the project. However, there were sub-narratives that moved in different ways- back and forth and tangentially, which I hope this alternative 'contents map' helps to articulate.

Motivations

Having found in their previous five projects that female participation outstripped male by 2:1, Restoke's ambition was to co-create a show entirely with male participants.

“Having worked in community arts for a long time, we’ve noticed that a lot more women than men get involved, particularly in performance events... There’s obviously a reason why men aren’t getting involved in our projects... and we’re interested to see what those barriers are and how we can address them.” – Paul Rogerson, Co-Artistic Director.

The decision to develop a project idea around the topic of masculinity and mental health was inspired by Restoke's own personal experiences and the wider debate in society around the links between masculinity and depression and suicide. They wanted to question why men don't ask for help.

Designing the Project

In early 2017 Restoke began planning the project. Since the participants would likely be men who suffer or have suffered from mental ill health, Restoke needed to be aware of the potential difficulties of tackling this subject for the participants and took steps to ensure their approach would be sensitive and informed by best practice in this field. They approached the public health department at the city council and the charity 'Mind' about what safeguarding and support measures would be appropriate and discovered that a light touch approach would be best. Restoke were advised against having a counselor or therapist in the room, and instead, construct an environment of trust and mutual support between the project delivery team and between the participants.

Restoke Core Team



Clare Reynolds
Co-Artistic Director



Paul Rogerson
Co-Artistic Director



Sarah Nadin
Marketing Manager



Sarah Richardson
Projects Manager

For more on constructing a supportive environment see page 12

For post-project reflections on support and safeguarding see pages 44 and 52

Recruiting Male Artists

Anticipating the difficulty of the task at hand, Restoke wanted to offer potential participants as many ways as possible to get involved, (dance, music, visual art and spoken word) and decided to recruit male artists to lead in each field. They felt that participants who had little or no experience in the performing arts would feel more comfortable expressing themselves creatively if led by example. This also ensured that creativity emerged from a masculine perspective, rather than being interpreted and taught by female bodies and voices.

At this time Restoke's existing pool of associate artists was mostly female. They drew three male artists from their existing pool (Co-Artistic Director Paul being one of them) and recruited two lead artists in dance and poetry at this stage. As the project progressed, Restoke would have 7 male professional practitioners on the project, 5 of whom went on to perform in Man Up themselves, becoming integral to the dynamic of the group and having powerful transformative experiences themselves.

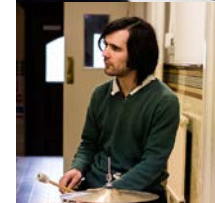
In addition to this, Restoke would give 3 other male dance artists the opportunity to shadow the process for a number of days. When outside expertise was required, namely in Northern Soul dancing, they brought in a male tutor to deliver it.

More about Northern Soul on page 22
 More about Shadowing Dancers and Recruiting Dancers on page 20

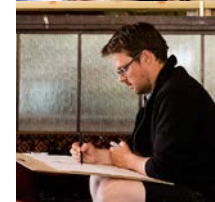
Paul Rogerson, Co-Artistic Director and Composer



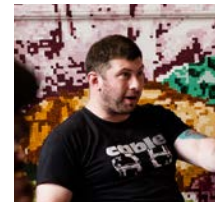
Mike Walsh, Musician-Percussion and Composition



Rob Pointon, Artist-Illustration and documentation.



Jamie Thrasivoulou, Poet- Writing/Spoken Word performance.



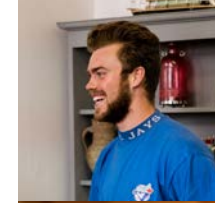
David McKenna, Dance Artist



Paul Sadot, Northern Soul Expert



Frankie Hickman, Dance Artist



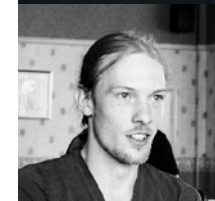
Rhys Dennis, Dance Artist



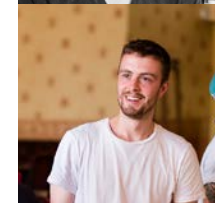
Shadowing Dancers:



Charlie Cossen,



Robert Hemming



Louis Ellis

Men Wanted

First Call-out flier November 2017

Restoke want men from all walks of life to take part in Man Up, a ground-breaking project looking at mental health and masculinity.

From the football terrace to the garden shed, the boardroom to the choir, Man Up offers the chance to see your ideas and experiences brought to life in a landmark performance event.

You can engage in any way you like, through one-on-one interviews, workshops, or offering practical skills. Spoken word, poetry, illustration, music, art, or a knockout on the dance-floor, there is a role for you in Man Up.

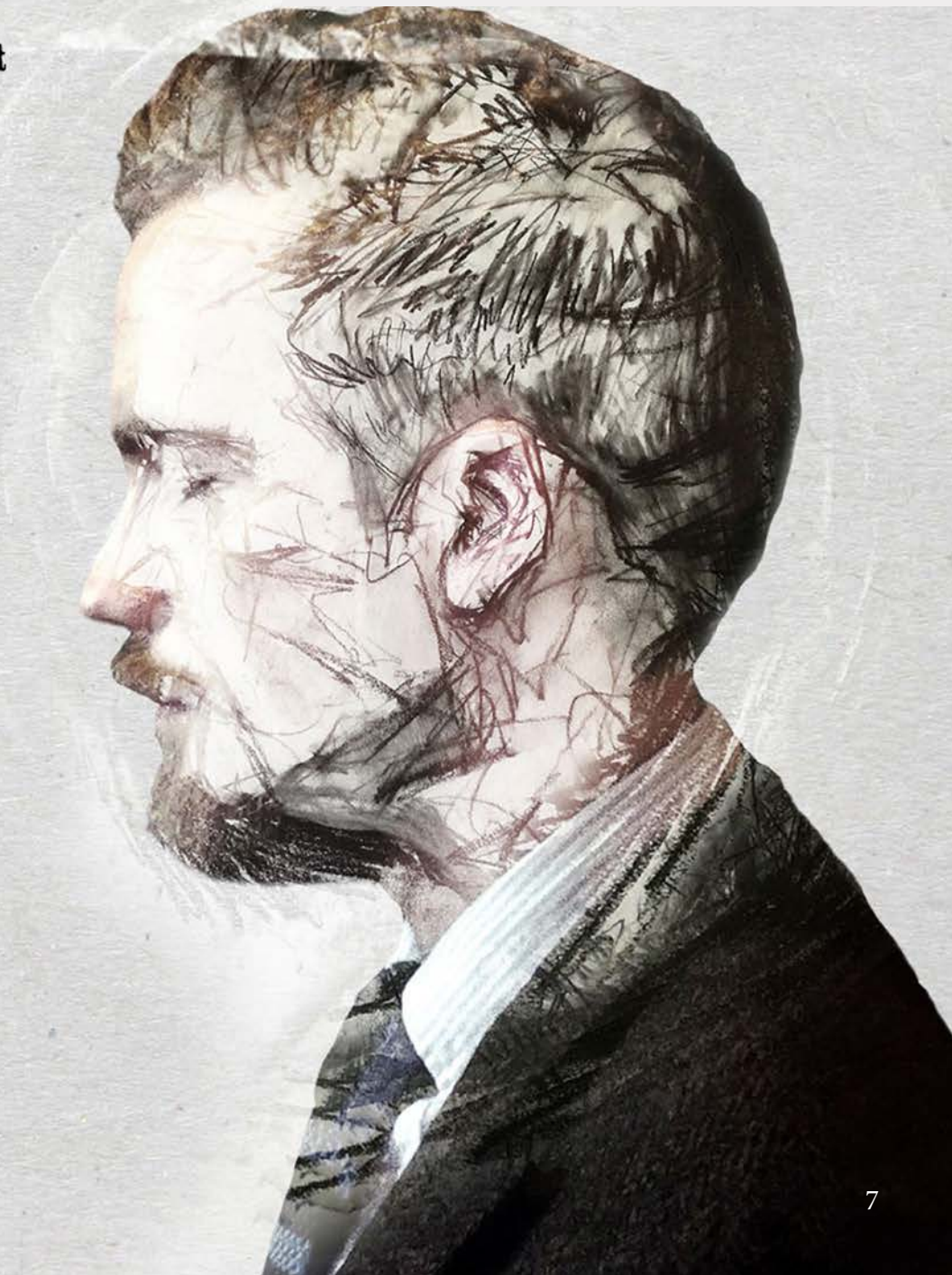
Men - we would love to hear from you. Let's take the mental health conversation, and your part in it, forward.

Please get in touch with us by email:
info@restoke.org.uk

Restoke create unmissable performances in Stoke-on-Trent, inspired by real-life experiences of people living in the city.

www.restoke.org.uk

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The Open Call & Open Meetings

Given past difficulties with engaging men in performance projects, Restoke expected a modest number of men to respond to the initial online call out and anticipated having to work quite hard (going to pubs, workplaces and men's groups) to gather enough participants to develop a show. However, after their initial call out in November 2017, their expectations were greatly surpassed.

Restoke received over 170 emails from men who were interested in Man Up. Two weeks later, 63 men attended two open meetings to find out more about the project.

It was clear that the 63 men that came to these initial meetings had been compelled to attend because of the urgency of the problem of mental ill-health in men. Many came because of their personal experience with mental ill-health or had worked in mental health and had seen the scale of the problem. There was a sense that something had to be done, and Man Up provided an opportunity to talk openly about the issue with others who shared their concerns. Furthermore, the fact that there would be a performance at the end of the project provided a positive and practical framework to explore the subject further, and a guarantee that their voices would be heard. Of these 63 men, 14 went on to perform in Man Up alongside the creative team and 3 other participants- two of which attended 1-to-1 meetings and 1 who joined at a later stage.

More about 1-to-1 Meetings on page 13

More about participation and commitment on pages 26-27

“It’s something that personally resonates with me in many ways. I wanted to see how others felt and to be a part of something to help others and myself.” - Open Meeting Attendee



This initial response would set the tone for the level of participation throughout the project, which was a huge success in regards to Restoke's initial ambition to involve more men in performance, but it came with its own set of challenges.

“The project never got smaller, it just got bigger” - Clare, Restoke.

More about these challenges on page 25

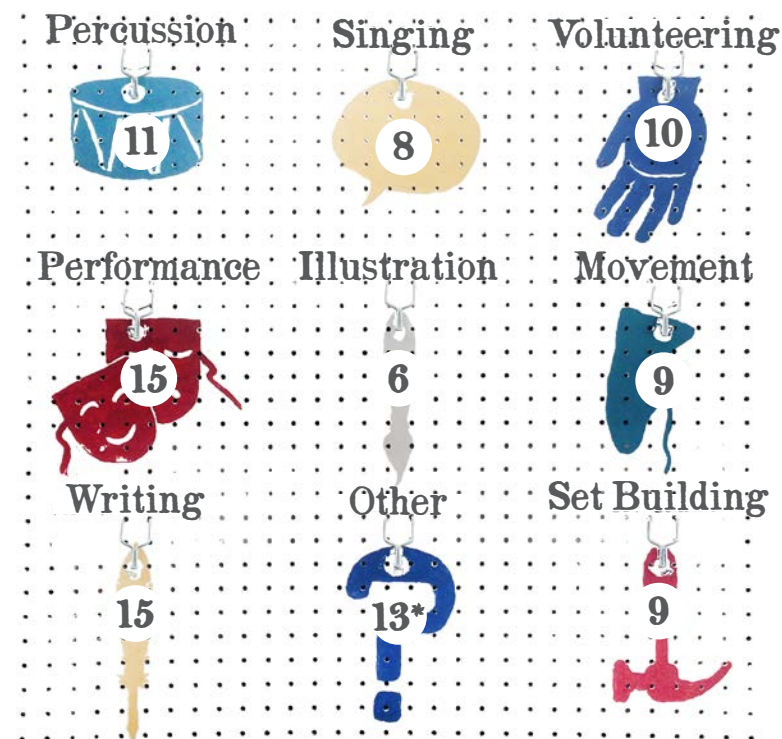
Another of Restoke's early expectations were confounded during the project. They had anticipated that some men would not take performative roles in the project, but would assume practical roles- as set builders or technicians (more traditionally masculine pursuits) or engage in illustration and documentation with the project's visual artist Rob Pointon. However, as the project developed, all of the participants took on performing roles, with some taking on additional supporting roles.

There is evidence of multiple interconnected reasons for this, one- that the process of developing the show encouraged the participants towards performance so effectively that there was no call for 'safe' modes of participation. Two- that the skills and interests inherent in the group were more creative than practical, and three- the venue eventually chosen for Man Up required very little set building or scenic intervention.

More about the venue on page 18

More about safe spaces on pages 12-13

Skills Peg Board- Consultation tool used at the two open meetings to gauge interest in 8 specific ways to participate, and an 'other' option for additional skills and interests. The numbers represent how many men registered an interest in each field across the two meetings. Meeting attendees registered many more creative/performative skills and interests than practical/supporting ones.



* In the 'other' category, there were also more creative interests listed than practical (9/4 respectively). Creative interests included film, photography, animation and music and practical skills included data analysis, fundraising and IT support.

Mini Case Study- Frankie Hickman



Frankie Hickman graduated from London Contemporary Dance School in 2017, and had since moved back to his home town of Tamworth. He heard about the project from another dancer who saw the advert online. Through personal experiences Frankie had developed a passion for mental health awareness in men, so he decided to attend one of the open meetings.

He continued to attend the workshops as a participant, but when the opportunity arose to recruit more dancers, Frankie became a member of the creative team as well as one of The Up Men, leading workshops and performing in Man Up itself.

He continues to work with Restoke on Man Up legacy programmes and often meets up with The Up Men, especially when there is an opportunity to dance to Northern Soul. He describes the experience of working on the project as 'life changing'. Frankie's experience exemplifies the blurred line between professional and non-professional performers that made Man Up so transformative, not just for the community participants, but for the practitioners themselves.

Based on the experiences he had working on Man Up, he has decided to remain in the Midlands for the time being rather than trying to pursue work as a dancer in London. Opportunities provided by Restoke and the like outside of London are crucial to retaining talent in the regions, where it is sorely needed.

Taster Workshops

In March 2018 Restoke ran taster workshops that introduced the prospective participants to some of the creative forms they were likely to encounter during the project. This included singing led by Restoke co-director Paul Rogerson, writing led by project poet Jamie Thrasivoulou, drawing led by project artist Rob Pointon and dance led by Dance Artist David Mckenna.

Many of the men found the taster sessions challenging, having had little to no experience of what they were being asked to do in a room full of strangers.

“I nearly walked out of the taster. I got far too self conscious.” - CJ

**“It felt like going into a PE lesson, being CRAP at sport, fearing I'd be last to be chosen for the team.”
- Nick**

“I suddenly realised just how much I didn't identify as male. I felt confused.” - Adrian B

For some, the taster sessions proved to be too challenging and they left the project at this stage. Those that decided to continue were spurred on by a commitment made to themselves and the project.



“I realised I needed to face my fears” - CJ

“I’d committed to the journey, wherever it took me” - Rob

“Why did I come back? Pure stubbornness didn’t want to give in” - Adrian B

The Creative Weekend

For those that chose to continue, the creative weekend in April 2018 began with the Man Up Mission Statement. The mission statement was devised by Restoke to set the tone for the project going forward, to ensure that everyone understood what to expect and what was expected of them. This mission statement helped to establish a shared ethos, which ensured that the development of the show remained rooted in personal experience. It also encouraged respect for the experience of others, which helped create an open forum within which the participants could share thoughts, experiences and ideas unburdened by judgment.

“One of the points on the Man Up mission statement is that it is not therapy. That being said, it is therapeutic.”
- Howard

Environment of Support

To ensure that the project delivery team felt adequately supported, Restoke built in time before and after each session for artists to ‘check in’ with each other. This was an opportunity for the team to flag up any difficulties they may be having with the project, personally and professionally, and to discuss whether they felt any of the participants needed extra support. This worked well, but did not adequately address the support needs of the core team. For more on this see page 52

MAN UP MISSION STATEMENT

We are here to share the diverse and unique experiences of people in this room.

We share our experiences and reserve our opinions.

We seek out collective experiences, but also individual stories which may challenge stereotypes and stigma around mental health and masculinity.

We are co-creators of this. We collaborate and support each others' creative journeys.

We are not here to create one vision of, or future for, maleness.

We listen without judgement and we keep an open mind.

We ask questions, but we don't always need answers - we're not trying to solve anything.

This is not therapy, but feel free to have a therapeutic experience.

We make art, wholeheartedly.



Over the two days, the participants discussed potential common themes garnered from the open meetings and taster workshop, plus information gathered in 1-to-1 meetings conducted by Restoke. They shared their own stories, danced, and sang together, and were all shocked by how little time it had taken to form a bond and to create a safe space in which to be expressive.

“I don’t fully understand the implications behind the phrase ‘safe space’ but the Man Up weekend has given me a ‘safe space’ in which I can try new forms of expression about topics that I wouldn’t normally explore to this extent.” - Paul F

1-to-1 Meetings

For those who wanted to contribute to the project but felt that they couldn’t take part, or wanted to share their stories more discretely, Restoke offered 1-to-1 interviews. They conducted 15 such interviews between the project launch and the creative weekend, themes from which were used as starting points for discussion. Some of these interviewees went on to volunteer as stewards during show week, and 3, Howard, H and Jamie N, later decided to attend the workshops and ended up performing in the show, 2 of whom delivered monologues. (See pages 48-50)

The Birth of 'The Up Men'

It was during this weekend that the term 'The Up Men' was coined, which signaled a significant step in the group's development, upending the negative connotations associated with the term 'man up' to reflect more of what was really happening to them.

It was at this point that The Up Men began to feel more comfortable with each other and what they were creating together. The movement workshops provoked a great deal of humour and laughter, which became a firm feature of the group for the remainder of the project. This atmosphere of carefree play provided the lightness necessary to safely explore the darkness of mental ill-health, and would go on to set the tone for the performance, which incorporated moments of both joy and despair.



“To see barriers and stigmas broken down so quickly and effectively within such a short space of time is something we should all learn from.”

- Rob, Up Man

“I have rarely felt so present, so connected, and humble. The feeling of humanity and the bonding is incredible. I danced!”

- CJ, Up Man

“I was challenged, encouraged, affirmed, supported, fed, occupied, taught, enlightened.”

- Keith, Up Man



The results of many of the workshops that happened during The Creative Weekend can be clearly seen to have manifested in the performance itself.



Stories

Objects

Memories



Stereotypes

Song

Gestures

Securing The Venue

Restoke had intended for the performance to take place in one of Stoke-on-Trent's many empty industrial buildings. Having hosted four previous performances in disused spaces, they had developed R&D methods alongside participants to integrate performances into the fabric of their venues. When researching venues for Man Up, however, Co-Artistic Directors Clare and Paul were unable to find somewhere that had the right qualities. Until May 2018, Man Up was still without a venue.

The venue that fit the bill was Goldenhill Working Men's Club. Situated in the far north of the city, it had a dance-floor, a stage, a bar, a box office and wonderful character. Mick, the club steward, was welcoming and open-minded about hosting the show; Though for Restoke, developing a performance in an occupied building with its own life, was rather challenging, not least because Man Up rehearsals had to fit in around the club's already busy schedule of entertainment nights, community group meetings and events.



Built and opened to the public in 1971, Goldenhill Working Men's Club remains a cornerstone of its local community. Every Sunday lunches are served in the Concert Room and diners are entertained with 'Sunday Club' games, music and bingo.

“Eight years ago, if you weren't here at 12:30pm on a Sunday, you'd struggle to find a seat”. - Mick, Club Steward.

Although weekends are still the club's busiest days, the numbers have dropped significantly. Mick believes this is due to changes in the workplace; “more shift work and regulations” along with cheap alcohol in shops, the smoking ban and changing social attitudes. During the project, members were considering whether to demolish and rebuild the club, thinking that modern facilities could help to retain and bring in new members. Staging Man Up here demonstrated that, should they decide to keep the current building, it can accommodate a wider range of uses with minimal adaptation, and draw in additional revenue to keep the club going.

Project Artist Rob Pointon Painting a World Cup match in the lounge at Goldenhill W.M.C.





More about the project's impact on the club on page 53

Artist Recruitment

Before The Up Men were introduced to the venue, Restoke completed the creative team by recruiting dancers Frankie (an existing Up Man) and Rhys.

The Up Men were invited to take part in an audition process, interviewing the candidates and helping to decide who got chosen. Three of The Up Men took up this offer. Those that did felt privileged to be allowed into this process, and a sense of duty and responsibility, not only to the final performance, but to Co-Artistic Directors Clare and Paul and their fellow Up Men.

“I felt like Clare and Paul should be supported and, as an Up Man, I needed to be involved. I feel like the quicker The Up Men bond with the new dancer the better it will be for the performance.” - CJ, Up Man

Restoke were keen to extend the learning experience presented by Man Up to as many male dance artists as possible, and offered 3 additional dance artists shadowing opportunities on Man Up.

“There is a significant lack of men working in participatory dance so to potentially inspire more male artists to pursue this felt important.” - Clare, Restoke.

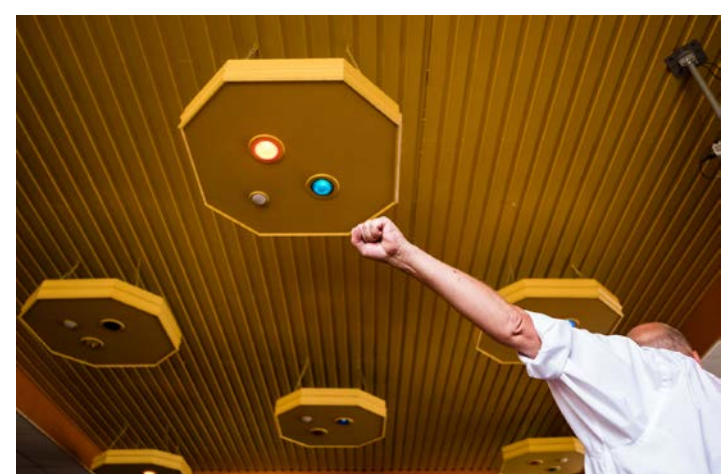
For the shadowing dancers, this experience provided valuable insight into the process, which was enhanced by the welcoming atmosphere provided by The Up Men, who by this point, were confident enough to allow others into the circle.

“Some of the conversations I have had with participants have left a deep impression and I am very humbled regarding their openness in sharing experiences and thoughts with me... The respect, social dynamic and artistic vision and execution of the company strongly resonate with my sought-for work environment and artistry.” - Robert Hemming, Shadowing Dancer.



The Up Men at The W.M.C.

The Up Men were introduced to the venue on 30th June 2018, less than 8 weeks before the performance opened. Each of the sessions from then on were conducted in the space in which the show would be performed- the club's Concert Room. The first sessions here concentrated on getting to know the space, imagining how it could be used to tell the stories that had emerged through the workshop process so far, as well as considering the stories of masculinity, past and present, that the venue itself evoked. Moving into the venue was a key moment for the professional performers, who at this point began to get a clearer idea of what their contributions to the final performance would be.



Connecting with the Venue Through Performance

The Concert Room of Goldenhill Working Men's Club has a stage and a dance floor that not only made it an ideal venue for this performance but echoes the vernacular uses of the space by working men and their families through the decades. The connection would be made between the performance and the venue by referencing these uses- including karaoke and dancing, particularly Northern Soul dancing.

A workshop by esteemed choreographer and Northern Soul expert, Paul Sadot, was held at the beginning of July, which helped The Up Men to learn about this important aspect of local working-class culture from the heyday of the club. Paul expressed with great passion what the movement meant to the working-class people that popularised Northern Soul in Stoke, Wigan and Blackpool from the 1970s onwards, putting the dance moves that The Up Men were learning in their proper social context- on the dance-floors of Working Men's Clubs like the one they were standing on. This workshop was a real turning point for many of The Up Men, who felt huge enjoyment from learning this dance and its history. Several of The Up Men some weeks later attended the Northern Soul All-Nighter at the Kings Hall in Stoke and continue to seek out new opportunities to dance.



“I remember right at the start of rehearsals being nervous and uncomfortable, wondering if I would be up to the task. The Northern Soul workshop helped to change those feelings enormously.”

- Paul F, Up Man.

Chance Encounters

Although fitting in sessions around the club's already busy schedule of entertainment nights and community meetings was challenging, working in a lively building also had its benefits, including the welcoming atmosphere and the new audiences gained from the club's staff, locals and their children. One example of this came when three young boys entered the Concert Room during the Northern Soul workshop. At first, they edged around the room cautiously but quickly found the confidence to join in, exchanging acrobatic flourishes with the professional dancers. It is hard to imagine that this exchange would have happened if all of the dancers had been women, or if the atmosphere created by The Up Men was not as relaxed and joyful as it was.



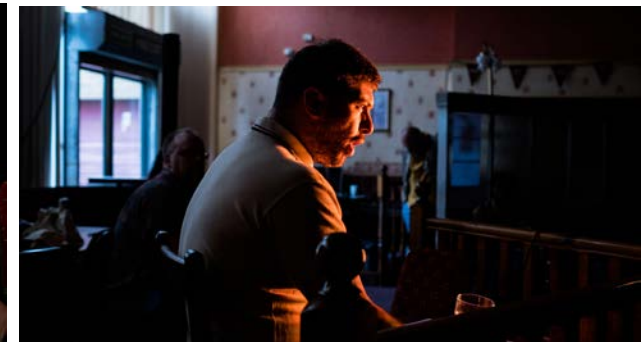
For more chance encounters at the W.M.C. see page 41

Individual Stories

At this point in the development of the performance, scenes were beginning to emerge based on prominent individual stories from The Up Men. This was a difficult time for some, including Restoke, who were again entering new territory. In previous projects, there had been much stronger commonalities between the stories being told, whereas with Man Up, there was no one narrative that could encapsulate the diverse and nuanced relationships each Up Man had with his own mental health.

It is unsurprising, then, that at the rehearsal stage Man Up lost 3 cast members, who decided to step away from the project. As the performance became more defined it became clear to some that their individual voices wouldn't be heard in the performance and working as a group to tell the story of others was not what they needed. (See poem on page 25).

Out of 21 cast members, 6 delivered monologues, comprising 5 personal stories and 1 character piece developed by project writer Jamie Thrasivoulou. The remaining 15 cast members took part in ensemble scenes that weaved around the monologues, representing other diverse aspects of masculinity and mental health. For some, the bond that had been created in the previous months was the driving force behind their commitment. Some felt it was their duty to share what they had learned with others. Many were simply enjoying the process—singing, dancing and spending time together.



Deciding on Stories

Individual stories explored in the monologues included aspects of masculinity arising from being a black man, a gay man, a transitioning man and explored problems with work— as a high pressured professional, an isolated office worker and a working class white man. When reflecting in the weeks following the performance, some of The Up Men regretted that other important aspects were not explored, including fatherhood, sex, relationships and disability.

The Up Men conceded that Restoke had to progress the project with the stories that emerged most prominently and organically during the research phase. As The Up Men's confidence grew through the development phase, more and more narrative potentialities emerged that could not be accommodated given the time remaining and capacity of the company. This is one of the challenging ways in which the performance continued to grow, rather than distill, during the development process.

Capacity

Restoke chose the monologues that would feature in the performance based on stories that had been told to them by individuals, either in person, during 1-to-1 interviews or via e-mail. This was not a programmed activity, it happened naturally during the research phase of the project. This later resulted in some confusion in the group about how Restoke selected the individual stories, and some of The Up Men wished they had known about this process earlier. This is something that Restoke reflected on following the performance and will work to manage in future projects, but for Man Up, the capacity to develop more individual stories with such a large cast was limited.

After the initial workshops, Co-Artistic Director Clare reflected on the difficulties of balancing pastoral care- i.e. ensuring that the experience was positive for everyone involved- with the artistic direction of the show.

Restoke recognise that the process of dancing, singing, playing, sharing and listening during the primary phase of a project fosters an environment that allows participants to develop their own support systems. In the future Restoke will allow for a longer workshoping phase to allow trust and support to be built within the group in advance of the devising/rehearsal phase. If Restoke work with such a large cast again, they would look to recruit a rehearsal director; an additional outside eye who can support the participants journey so that the Creative Directors can step back when needed to increase capacity during this time.

Have a free note.

Can't do it, me.

Yeah, it'll be good.

But it ain't me.

I'm not the team player

I'm needed to be.

It's out on my own...

Here's a buzz word

Diversity

It's really sweet

But it ain't me.

Sat in the chorus

Where no one can see.

Surrounded, alone...

This is the catch word

Community

Banter and laughter

But it ain't me.

Inquisitive glances

Failing to see

Running feet, flown.

Sorry kids, I've got to go,

It's me, not you,

Just so's you know.

- Tim

"The quality of being open and expressive, without holding back anything of one's self, is universal.

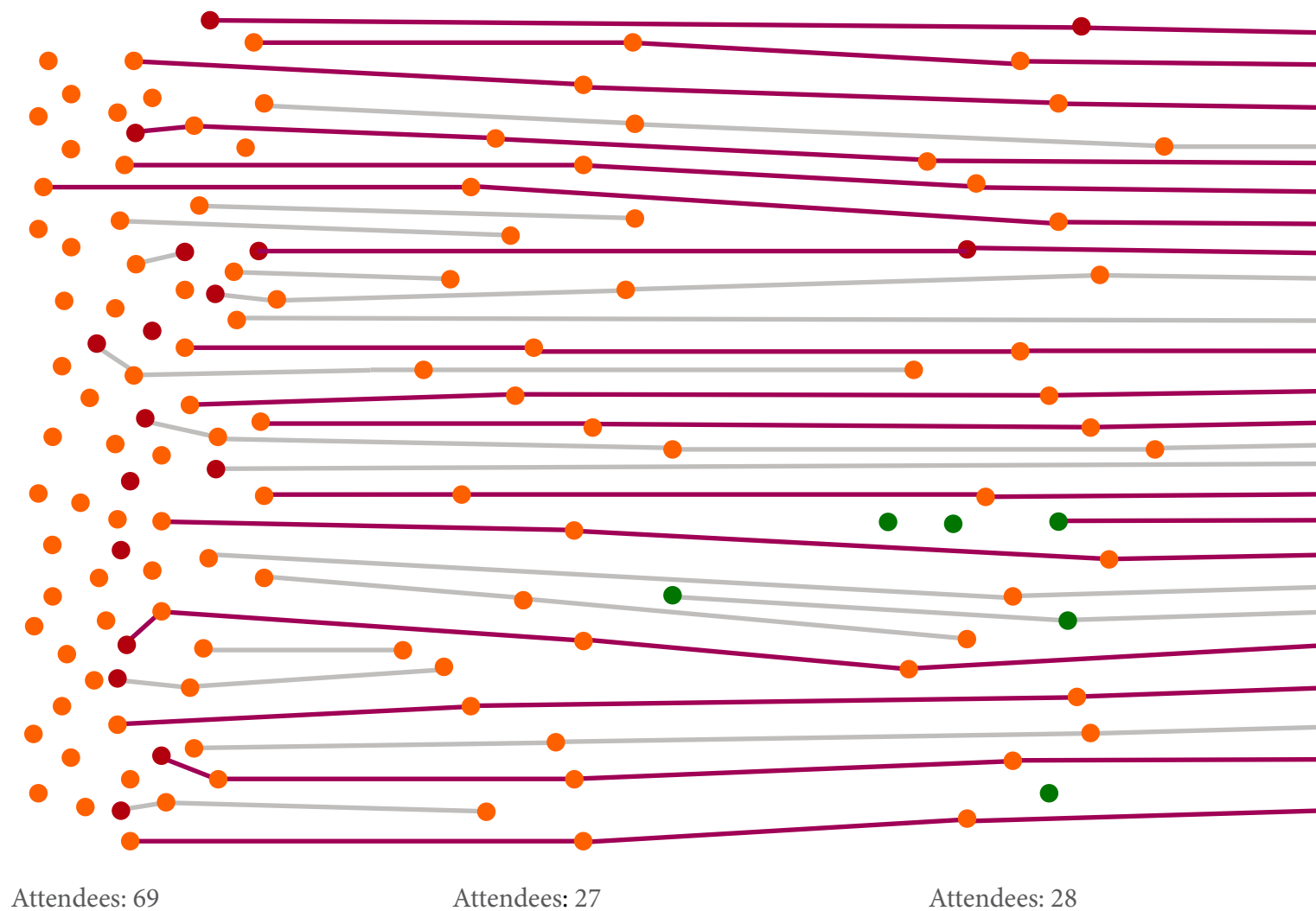
I'm not a black man, a gay man, a transitioning man, or many other types of man, but that didn't stop me from feeling represented by anybody's story thanks to the bonds we'd all forged as 'Up Men'. We shared in each other's ups and downs; we grew individually and collectively."

- Paul F, Up Man.

This map of participation highlights the scale of the task Restoke faced to keep people involved. From the 170 email inquiries to the 69 men who attended initial meetings, right through to the 25 men who went on to the development phase and beyond to the 17 men who made up the cast alongside 4 other project performers. There was unquestionably a high level of participation throughout. As the project progressed, participants began to need less support from Restoke, having found in each other emotional support through social meet-ups and online conversations and practical support such as lifts to rehearsals.

Research Phase Various Locations

Meetings Taster Sessions Creative Weekend



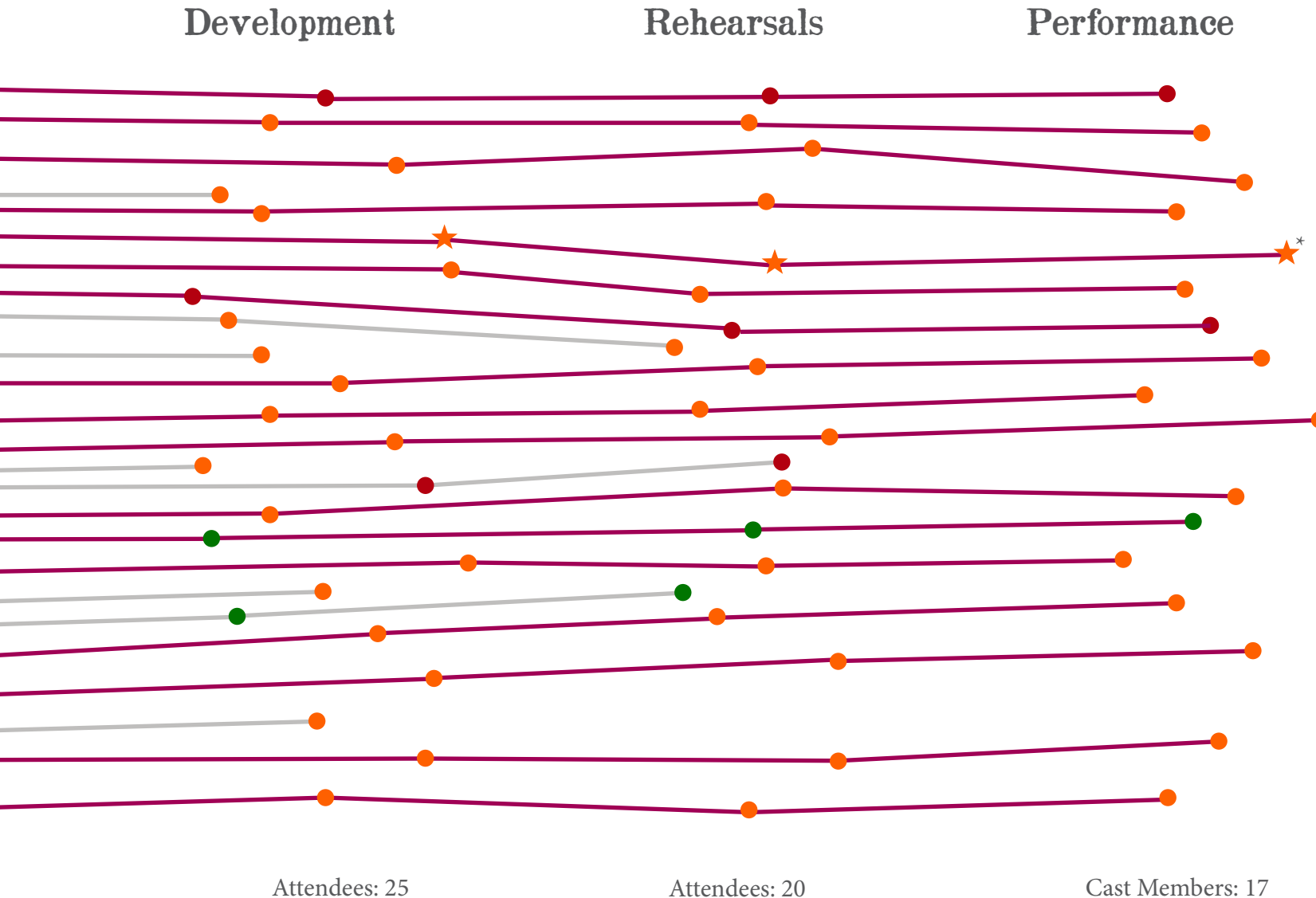
Key

- Attended Open Meetings
- Attended 1-to-1 Meetings
- ★ Employed by the Project*
- Joined the project later
- Journey of a participant through the project
- Journey of a Man Up Performer through the project

Total number of participants: 72
lost 49 = 68% loss

Development Phase

W.M.C.



Attendees: 25

Attendees: 20

Cast Members: 17

Total number of participants: 25
lost 8 = 32% loss

It is clear from this data that almost all the men involved in the project for a significant length of time did so from the very beginning, with only one cast member joining the group later in the process. This cast member was also a participant in Restoke's last project 'You Are Here' and so was already confident about the process and familiar with the company.

This data shows that the rate of commitment in the development phase more than doubled following the Creative Weekend. Most of the drop off in the development phase was due to participants' inability to accommodate the more demanding rehearsal schedule. Three of those who couldn't commit their time volunteered as ushers during show week and one facilitated a post-show wellbeing activity (see page 44).

The majority of those in the research phase attended the first meeting or 1-to-1 meetings only, however, themes and stories captured here went on to influence the development of scenes, particularly the final scene of the show.

* See mini case study page 10

Rehearsal Phase

With the show taking shape and the cast in place and committed to the performance, rehearsals began in earnest, led by Co-Artistic Directors Clare and Paul and supported by the project artists. At this stage of the project, costume, set pieces and technical elements were beginning to be introduced. This was a challenging time for Restoke, because many of the additions and adaptations to the space had to be packed down after each session to accommodate the club's own programme of events. This was an unanticipated challenge that Restoke had not faced during past projects in disused buildings.

Enjoyment of the project by The Up Men continued unabated as scenes began to come together and the form of the performance began to emerge. With the end of the project in sight some of them had begun to consider life after Man Up-questioning how they would keep the feeling going.



“We all, individually and collectively, took a huge leap out of our comfort zones, and into the unknown. That unknown however is now the known. It is no longer scary, and as a result, we have jointly created one of the most supportive, honest groups of people I have ever had the pleasure to work with.”

- Rob, Up Man





“The performance has become such a small part of this experience for me. Each week I just love really spending time in your company, listening to you, talking with you, laughing and generally just being.”
- Adrian B, Up Man



Case Study: Developing the Ending

Originally, Man Up was to end with lead dancer David's character losing the battle with his own mental health, in a piece that suggested that his story had ended in suicide. From the outset, Restoke were adamant that the performance should not have a 'happy ending', as this would detract from the graveness of the subject they were tackling.

During rehearsals, Up Men CJ and Rob found themselves positioned where they could watch this scene as the audience would. They both agreed that it wasn't right.

"I couldn't believe that so many weeks filled with humour and positivity had resulted in something so dark. I remember talking to a few people afterwards and finding out they felt the same."

- CJ, Up Man

CJ was able to put the group's concerns to Restoke during a meeting about the Man Up trailer, for which CJ was writing scene directions.

"As a storyteller, I felt the show lacked an effective ending, it did not have an antithesis, a life truth, there was no medicine to offer the audience that they could take with them." - CJ, Up Man

It was then that a few ideas were suggested and the possibility of a 'rewinding' of David's descent was put forward.

"While this was about intervention, it was also about the common wish that, those who have known people who've committed suicide, could turn the clock back for a second chance and do something to help."

- CJ, Up Man

In the next rehearsal, David went through the end scene as practiced, ending with him lying on the floor whilst poet Jamie delivered his narration- the poem 'Our Man'. Clare then asked David to rewind his performance, tracing all of his previous movements across the floor backwards until he was back in his starting position, whilst Jamie delivered a newly written 'Our Man' part II, a reprieve.

What came next was a pivotal moment in The Up Men's journey, and it had come just over a week before the opening night.



As the instigator of the change, Clare called on CJ to step into David's path and improvise what he thought should happen next.

“Our instinct was to gradually look each other in the eye and hug. Clare then asked the other Up Men to ad-lib what they felt was natural. A group hug was gradually formed, and this proved to be incredibly emotional for us and I don't think any of us were prepared for it.

CJ went on to describe the significance of this moment...

“It was a combination of regret and hope and a huge purge of built up emotion that had been building within us all. We'd been bottling up more than we thought, and the ending took on a sort of double meaning. It was about the importance of recognition and intervention but also all of us letting the walls around us come down and being unashamed to let our real emotions flood out. Something the Man Up process had allowed us to do.”

After this emotional improvisation, it was agreed that this should be the ending of Man Up. Restoke worked on framing this scene with uplifting music, but again The Up Men suggested that it could be framed better with more somber music. Clare from Restoke reflects on this artistic growth within the group.

“We always find endings so difficult, so to have this idea, and then the whole group to find the ending which felt natural and true for them was a real gift. The moment when we made a musical decision which didn't chime with everyone else (we were really excited about it!) was a great moment... I won't forget standing in the middle of the circle and being told we'd got it wrong. It felt like that was a pivotal moment when they realised it was their show.” -Clare, Restoke.





Closing the Circle



Observing the entire process, beginning to end, it seems entirely appropriate that the performance should end in an embrace. Getting into a circle had been the very first thing that the men had been asked to do together, and throughout the process, this circle had become smaller and smaller, tighter and tighter, more intimate and more supportive. The end scene of Man Up was the closing of the circle, symbolizing the many hours The Up Men had spent together- learning about each other and themselves, doing things that at first were structured, awkward and daunting but which later became genuine intimacy and expression.



Show Week

The performance was held in the Concert Room of Goldenhill Working Men's Club in Stoke-on-Trent in August 2018 and was seen by some 590 people across 5 shows.

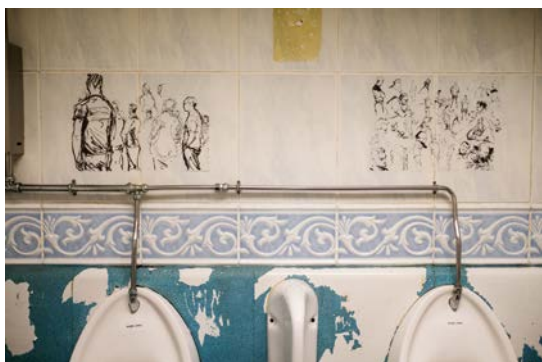




'Backstage' during Show Week



Exhibition in the W.M.C toilets and phone booth including writing, photography, drawings and mock posters made by The Up Men and project artist Rob Pointon. Man Up Merchandise- Mugs and Wellbeing Cards, which had been devised by The Up Men themselves.



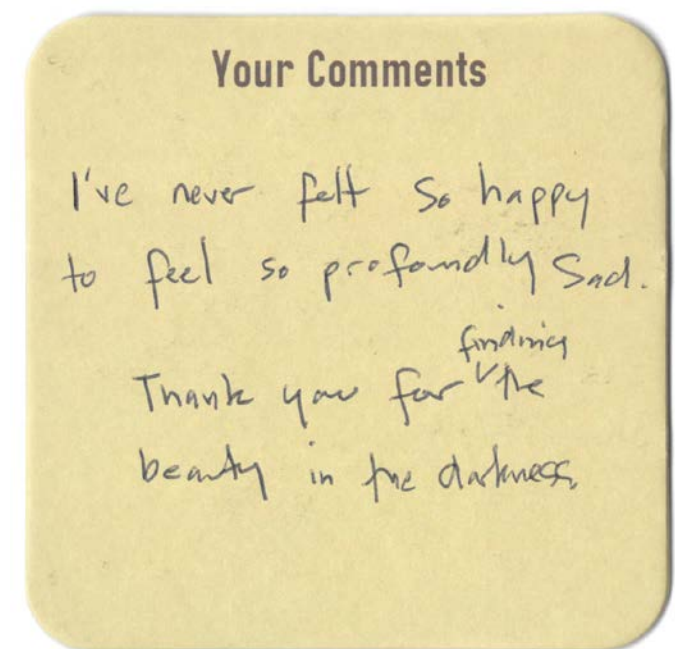
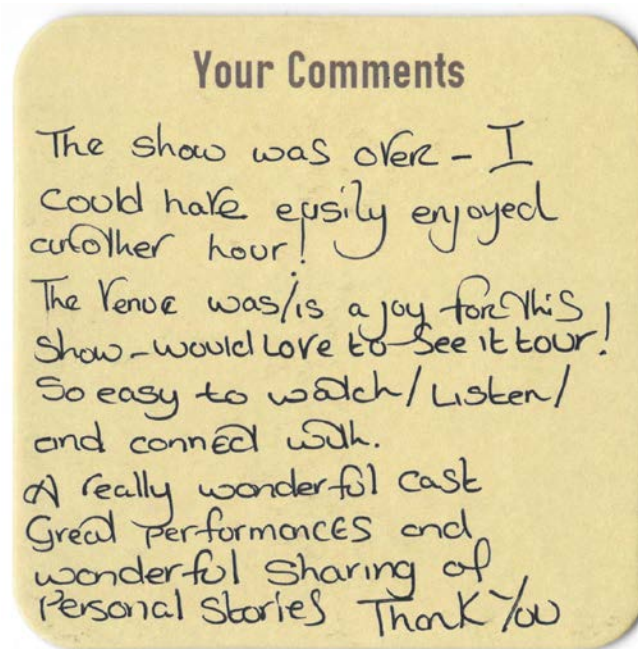
Audience Feedback

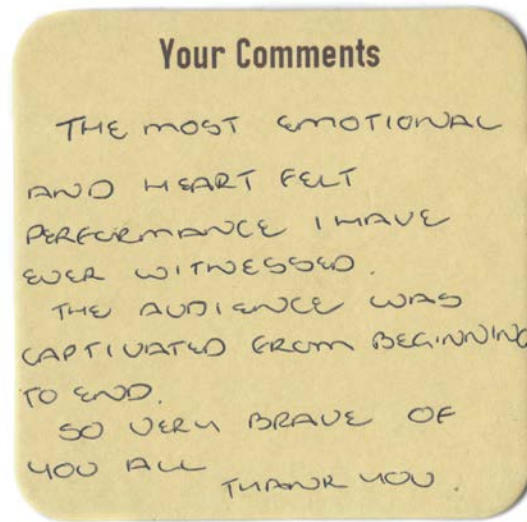
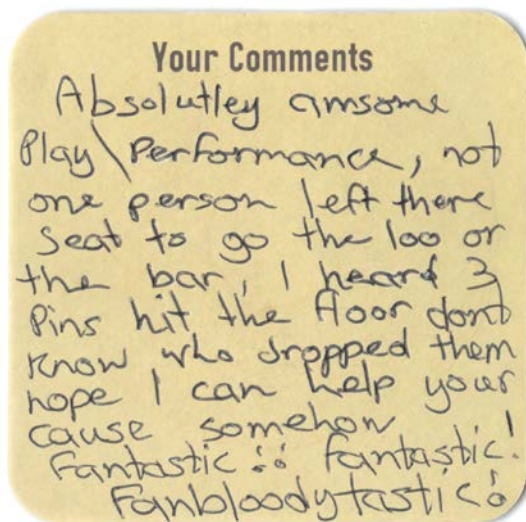
Beer mats were designed for Man Up, which included pictures of The Up Men and an illustration by Up Man Jamie N. These were placed on the audience's tables and, following the show, audience members were asked to leave their comments on the reverse side. Hundreds of moving and insightful comments were collected, from which several common themes emerged.

In addition to the following themes, there were very many positive comments about the set, cast, costumes, music and venue. This speaks to the quality of the production itself.

The words moving, intense, powerful, emotional, honest and inspiring are used very frequently in the feedback to describe the effect of the performance. This intense emotional atmosphere was evident in the room during the performances, with some people moved to tears.

“This was one of the most powerful pieces of human expression I have ever witnessed”
- Audience member.



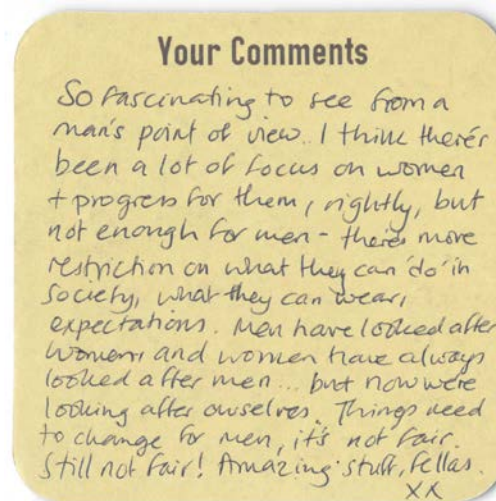


The Audience on The Audience

One of the most intriguing observations that emerged in the feedback was audience members' comments about the audience itself. Lots of people had noticed how incredibly captivated the entire audiences were from beginning to end. This might have had something to do with The Concert Room itself. The audiences were seated at tables in a crescent around the dance floor, as they would be on a regular club/ entertainment night. The Concert Room was designed for sociability- for people to see and interact with each other. For the performance, this increased the intensity of the experience.

Reflection

Many of the audience members used their comment cards to openly reflect on the themes of the performances, re-evaluating their own thoughts about masculinity and mental health. This is evidence of the popular comment 'thought provoking', which had been made by many others.



Engaging Workplaces

Each of the 4 evening performances were open to general audiences and sold out during performance week. With the Thursday matinée, Restoke attempted to try a new way of reaching specific audiences.

Inspired by The Up Men's early discussions about the lack of mental health support in the workplace, Restoke approached some of Stoke-on-Trent's large employers of men, including manufacturers, tech companies and distribution centres, and invited them to buy bundles of tickets for their employees to enjoy an after work special.

Restoke had hoped that engaging with these employers would begin a relationship which might help influence workplace policy surrounding mental health provision. Restoke also offered to go into these workplaces to deliver free talks to employees about the project. Though the reception for these offers was generally positive, ultimately only one employer bought a bundle of tickets, and another agreed to the free talk.

Neither of these interventions resulted in employees attending the performance. Subsequently, the matinée performance was made available for general audiences at the last minute, which resulted in an under-subscribed performance (around 100 of a potential 150 tickets sold). Given the level of interest from general audiences for the remaining performances, with more time to promote this extra showing it would most likely have sold out also.

Your Comments

I had high expectations but was caught out by my emotional response - under the skin twisting emotions - I wish I could share the performance with all the men in my life x

Your Comments

Absolutely amazing performance. I find it aw inspiring that so many men have found the courage to speak about their own experiences and share ^{so} a personal with an audience. Well done everyone! It gives us all hope that things can change for the better.

Your Comments

Amazing work, revealing insight and experience. The real strength of the piece is the variety and diversity of the men involved. Bravo! 😊

Bravery and Hope

Audience members also applauded the strength and bravery of The Up Men for allowing themselves to be vulnerable and coming forward to tell their stories in such a public and hard-hitting way. The fact that these men were able to do this made people hopeful that others could speak up and share their stories. People reported feeling complex emotions following the performance- being happy to feel sad, “under the skin twisting emotions”. This suggests that Man Up had gotten the tone of the piece right, leaving people with an uncomfortable feeling that more should be done, but with a sense of hope that it could.

Diversity

Many audience members commenting on the balanced and diverse representations of masculinity and mental health, arising from different life experiences. What was a challenging aspect of the show's coherent development had become one of its strengths, allowing different types of men (and women) in the audience, with their own complex relations to mental health, to relate to one or more of the representations of masculinity and mental health presented by The Up Men.

Your Comments

No production has better portrayed the complexities of ~~the~~ 21st Century masculinity without stepping into the dangerous territory of victimisation. Beautiful, moving.

Chance Encounters

During rehearsals Project Dancers Frankie and Rhys had met one of the locals of the W.M.C. and struck up a conversation about the project. He talked to them about his own struggles with mental ill health. Rhys and Frankie encouraged him to join the project but he felt he was not prepared for it at the time. On the 4th night of show week, he and his wife came to watch the show, and sat with Frankie for a while afterwards to tell him what had happened since their conversation. After talking about the project, he found the courage to talk to his wife about the severity of his depression, which- they said- interrupted a downward spiral and helped them both onto a more positive path. By way of thanks, the man made a Man Up metal sculpture (pictured below) and gifted it to The Up Men. For The Up Men, occurrences like this were proof positive that the project was having significant impacts not only inside the project, but outside of it too.



Your Comments

It was magnificent.
Work is good for you.
Jobs are bad!
It's made me decide to
go back to work as
a Samaritan.

Your Comments

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR
SHARING YOUR STORIES. THERE
IS PLENTY TO RELATE TO, PLENTY
TO THINK ABOUT, PLENTY TO BE
GRATEFUL FOR. YOU CAN BE
CERTAIN YOU HAVE HELPED YOUR
AUDIENCES.
THANK YOU (AGAIN)

Your Comments

to make more conversations
to hold a hand
to be a brother and a sister

these things i'll be more
about. thank you man up
for making me stronger to
stand up for my men.
Cara x

Influence

Strikingly, there were many comments that suggested that seeing Man Up would be life changing. One male audience member said that listening to H's story about jobs had brought him to the decision to go back to work for the Samaritans. A significant number of women commented that they would treat the men in their lives differently after having seen the show. From these comments, it is clear that the performance had a significant effect on its audiences that will proliferate in ways that are yet to be understood.

Your Comments

I have spent most of my life since early teens scared of men (not gay men) they were my social ills.
I will no longer be afraid of them, but for them...

Your Comments

Such an incredible performance. So meaningful I connected with this performance, the stories so in a way that makes me more aware of the challenges that the men in my life may face. It's my hope to support them.

Your Comments

I have a friend that needs to see this.

Please give us the opportunity.

X

Your Comments

TAKE IT
as
Tour
The Country Needs
it

Understanding and Awareness

There were many comments from members of the audience that suggested that their understanding and awareness of the issues surrounding masculinity and mental health had been enhanced by seeing the performance. This was most significant in comments made by women about the men in their lives, and by men talking about other 'types' of men.

Again! Please.

A significant amount of audience members wanted Man Up to be performed again. Some, so that they could experience it again themselves. In fact, several people came to see the performance more than once during show week. Another reason people gave for wanting the show to continue was so that other men they knew would have an opportunity to see it, particularly those who were themselves struggling with mental ill health. Thirdly, and most popularly, people wanted to see Man Up go on tour, so that men across the country would have an opportunity to see it too. This is a strong indication that audience members saw great therapeutic and educational value in the show.

Relatability

There was a significant number of positive comments left by men who had first-hand experience of mental ill-health and women who had lost men to suicide. This validation of the fidelity of the performance to their own experiences is a very strong indication that Man Up successfully interpreted the realities of the subject. This in turn is a strong validation of the co-creative method with which the performance was developed.

Your Comments
 As a long term depression sufferer the dialogue spoke to me personally
 Keep up the sterling work guys/gals R x

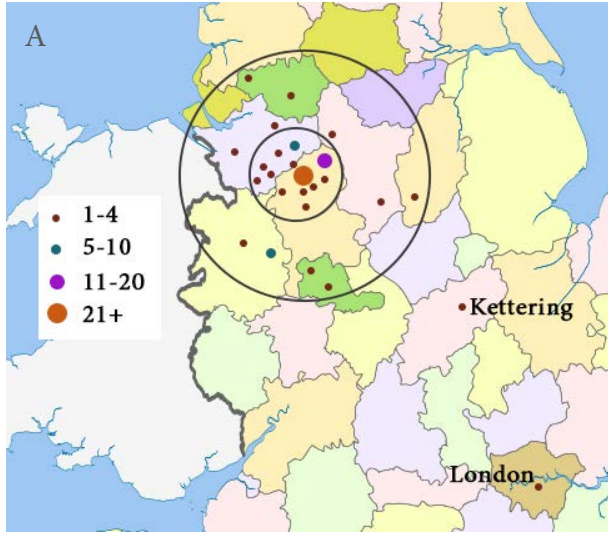
Your Comments
 I lost my son at the age of 33yrs. Till this day we have never found out why.
 Your story tells the problems we have in this world. He worked out exactly what he wanted by suicide.
 I think your story should be more showed over the country to make people more aware
 WEL DONE

Your Comments
 my husband took his own life through depression, you have got all the emotions down to a tea, please keep performing this show, take around Europe, millions of people can relate to this, well done everyone spot on show.

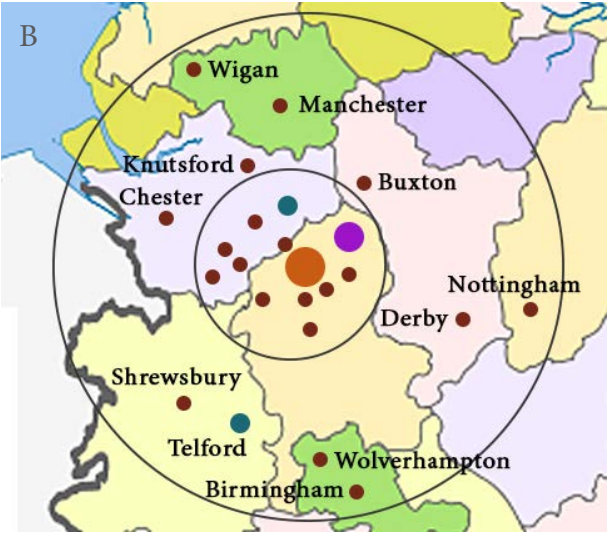
About the Audience

Anecdotally speaking, there seemed to be many more women in the audience than men, this observation was supported by a number of oral and written comments from audience members who had noticed the same thing. This could suggest that, although recruiting men to the project was very successful, attracting male audiences was less so. (See Engaging Workplaces on page 39 for more on this.) Analysing the ticket sale data (minus tickets bought by the cast) it is clear to see that most tickets were bought from within Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding areas of North Staffordshire and South Cheshire. However, audiences also came from the wider region, from as far as Wigan in the North and Birmingham in the South, and from Nottingham in the East and Chester in the West. Nationally, audiences came from as far as Kettering and London. This suggests that Restoke have growing reach towards audiences from further afield, which can be built upon and expanded in future projects.

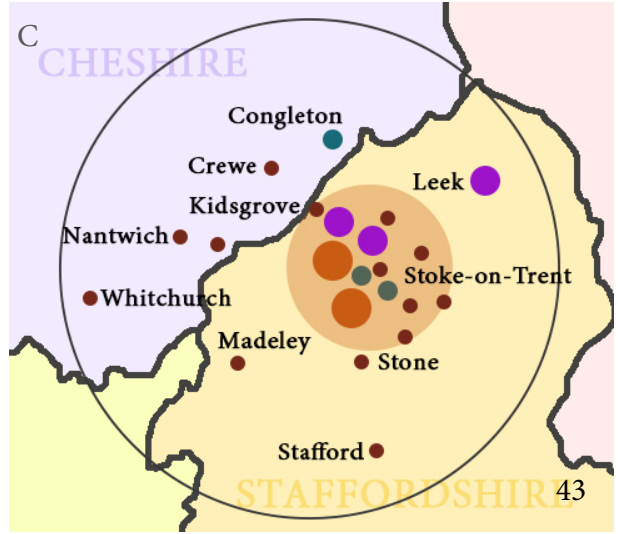
Map A:
 National ticket sales:
 175 ticket buyers
 (4 outside of circles)



Map B:
 Regional ticket sales:
 171 ticket buyers
 (26 in outer circle)



Map C:
 Local ticket sales:
 145 ticket buyers
 (114 in the S-o-T area)



The Up Men on Audience Feedback

During show week, The Up Men began to comprehend the importance of what they had achieved, based on the comments and conversations they were having with audience members after the show.

“We delivered something incredibly powerful that people have been crying out for... they just didn’t know they were crying out for it until it we gave it to them, big, bold and smack in the face.” - Rob, Up Man

This resulted in a sense of determination that the journey could not end there. They felt an obligation to continue with the momentum that they had built over the previous 9 months, to share what they had learned with more people- not only about coping with mental ill-health, but the creative skills that they had found to benefit them personally.

For more on maintaining the momentum of Man Up see page 46

Life After Man Up

Aftercare

After the highs of performance week inevitably came the ‘post show blues’. Being aware of this common phenomenon many performers feel after a show finishes, Restoke wanted to ensure that The Up Men were adequately supported through the transition from the intense experience of show week back into day-to-day life. One week after the performance Restoke organised a ‘gong bath’, which was delivered by The Chiron Institute, led by Dr. John Shapter who himself had attended one of the 1-to-1 meetings in the early days of the project. This was an opportunity for The Up Men to get together again to have a relaxing and therapeutic experience, and to get back into the circle and talk about how they were feeling. Many of The Up Men had experienced post show blues, but took consolation from the continuation of Up Men activities and the incredible audience feedback they had received. However, for some, walls had already begun to build back up.

“After the sharing circle I realised that the reason I had put myself on the periphery at the start of the evening was because of [the fear of] letting my guard down. Over the weeks with you all I shed it completely and over the last few days have started building it back up again. Self-preservation I guess. On returning home I find myself thinking that I don’t really want to go back to the person I was before this whole emotional exposure happened... I want to carry on wanting the friendships, wanting the conversations and wanting all the hugs. I want to take the emotional risk.”
-Adrian B, Up Man.

It was noted by The Up Men that none of the professional performers were present at the gong bath, some owing to prior work commitments and some because of the distance they would have to travel to attend, unpaid. Since this project was the first in which the performers were not locally based, Restoke later reflected on this important aspect of the post-show experience; In the future Restoke plan to build a few days post-show into performers’ contracts to make sure they can attend post-show activities to make the transition easier. This would not only benefit the community participants, but the performers too, who themselves had been strongly emotionally impacted by the project (For more on this see page 51).



Maintaining the Momentum

Within a month of the project ending, many of The Up Men demonstrated their commitment to self-care, creative expression and the continuation of the project and their friendships. Rob put his business and organisational skills in to practice by producing a map of potential avenues for the Man Up legacy. Paul F initiated discussions with The Up Men about producing a podcast about masculinity and mental health. He and some of The Up Men attended a podcast workshop to gain the skills necessary to take this idea forward. Paul is also planning to create a 'whatsapp' group to be promoted as a wider version of the circle, where men can share with each other creatively. Howard went straight from Man Up into another performance- Queens of the Coal Age by Maxine Peak at the New Vic Theatre- and continues to seek other opportunities to perform. Adrian M has been working with project poet Jamie T to promote himself and his poetry more widely and began writing new material. Jamie N and Adrian B took part in the BBC's Listening Project to continue conversations about masculinity, gender and sexuality. H organised 'Man Up in the woods' at the scout camp he volunteers at, where many of The Up Men got together to see each other again and take part in woodland activities. Brian has started taking contemporary dance classes and Courtney performs his self-devised contemporary dance routines at open mic nights and care homes. In November (2018) Courtney also organised 'One Vision' a cabaret night that included performances from The Up Men and other local acts, which raised £150 for The Up Men legacy project. Several other Up Men have been attending and performing at spoken word events and open mic nights and have been socialising regularly.

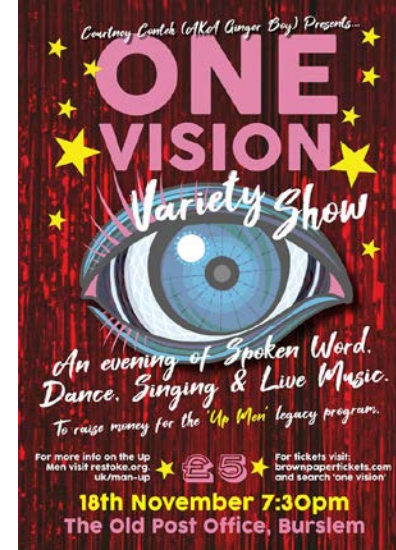
The rapid pace of The Up Men's post show activities demonstrates their determination to keep alive the fire that had been ignited by the process of creating Man Up. It is all the more important, therefore, that Man Up has a productive legacy. This is something that Restoke are already making great strides with. Man Up the performance looks to be just the start of the journey for Restoke, The Up Men and the many more Up Men it could potentially create.

“All of us are continuing the conversations we started at Man Up, supporting each other, coaching one another, and sharing tips on maintaining our well being while growing as individuals.”

- CJ, Up Man



For more on legacy see page 54



Previous page: Illustration of Goldenhill Working Men's Club by Jamie N.
 This page, clockwise from the top: Drawing of 'the circle' by Paul F, Howard backstage at Queens of The Coal Age, Co-Artistic Director Paul and his son at Up Men in the Woods, organised by Up Man 'H', Poster for One Vision- a variety show organised by Up Man Courtney, Photograph of Howard, Courtney and Nick on stage at One Vision, Man Up legacy map by Rob.

Impact on The Up Men

Describing the impact on The Up Men as a group raises the same challenges as describing their collective experiences of masculinity and mental health. Each Up Man's experience of the project was so specific to them that making general statements would be entirely inadequate. What The Up Men share, though, is the desire to keep coming together to build a legacy for the project, based on experiences of their own personal growth and the importance of the topic. The following two reflections from Up Men 'H' and Jamie N highlight the very different challenges, perspectives, ideas and benefits wrought from the project.



Up Man 'H': Reflections

When I first heard about Man Up, masculinity and mental health were things I'd been tangentially thinking about for a while. So I decided to get involved because, if nothing else, I could at least say "right, there's a load of information, here's a load of stuff that I think based on what I've done with regards to mental health and what I believe is the problem with masculinity- carry on!" I never planned on getting involved in the performance- that just sort of happened.

In the end getting more involved seemed the right thing to do. It seemed like it could be interesting, a giggle, and whatever conversation I had with Clare had obviously tickled my interest. So I thought, I'll turn up, see what happens, and it kept pricking my interest for long enough that I ended up doing it. Strictly speaking, I never committed to anything, that was my way of dealing with it- I just kept turning up.

The performance itself was quite surreal- I was there but I wasn't there. I had lots of jobs to do throughout the performance which suited me. After doing the tech rehearsal and realising that two spotlights were the only things that were going to be switched on in the room, and how black it was out there, I thought "I reckon I can get away with this". I ended up zoning out; on most of the nights I forgot that people were there.

Seeing the film now, I still think- "That can't be me, I couldn't have done that." There's a pride in there, to have been part of it, I know it was a full group effort. There wasn't anyone who I think did any more than anybody else. It was weird not having Keith there on the last night- despite the fact that he wasn't giving a monologue and wasn't one of the main dancers- he was Keith, and he was doing his bit. I've hung around with bands my entire adult life, and a bit more, and I thought I understood some of the camaraderie, then doing Man Up made me realise that being in the middle of it was completely different.

“So, where does the adventure take us from here? Well, hopefully, it'll take us forward and show us that it's OK to be unsure about who we are at times, that it's fine to be fluid in our thoughts and feelings about ourselves and our roles in life... Personally I'd like to think that this is the start of something bigger for myself and others. Something we can come together on and create, share and develop ourselves further through more interaction, discussion and performance.” - Matt, Up Man

In the performance nobody was indispensable. You couldn't have missed out one of the monologues or have somebody deliver somebody else's monologue, but you'd find somebody who could do their own, you could evolve this- forever. You could have spin offs, because it was more than the sum of its parts and as a consequence, those parts are interchangeable- as long as you're swapping quality for quality.

Life after Man Up has been a mixed bag. The comedown has been quite harsh- part of it semi self-inflicted by pulling out of social media and my usual winter habits. I enjoyed Paul getting the choir back together again; it was exactly 50/50 split of Up Men and newcomers, which was good because it was good to have some of the gang there, but I would have felt sorry for the newcomers if the balance had been different. Prior to that there was a meeting to talk about a steering comity for Man Up- I'd be interested to carry on with that.

I got involved because I understand that it's important. There are things that I personally get out of it- from having done it and the involvement, but equally part of what I get out of that is the fact that other people take stuff away from it. Listening to the stories that have come back from people being affected by it through some of the beer mats, I get more out of that than I will ever get out of it myself. Yes, I understand that the challenge of me sitting in front of 120 people per night talking for 5 minutes still isn't something I can imagine myself doing, despite the fact that I've done it, but the comeback from that- that's what makes it worth it.

One of the therapies I use to deal with my anxiety asks 'do I value this enough to argue against the voices in my head that are going "don't do it"?' and Man Up was one of those things. If the legacy project continues, I'm up for it. I'm petrified, but I'll do it because I know that what we have to say is important.

As much as the individual monologues were important to shed a light on different aspects of what it is to be male, I think that having that opportunity of camaraderie was the most powerful thing. That ending- watching CJ come across to David and then seeing everyone else come in- that. It's seeing men together that makes it important.





Up Man Jamie N: Reflections

As a trans man born in Stoke-on-Trent who works in and wrestles with mental health, there aren't many ways in which this project could have been more relevant to me.

I presumed that this would be like previous ventures into cis space; a polite tussle for narrative rights that would end in me probably being a little antagonistic and celebrating the small but important ground I'd gained. Walking into a room of blokes from Stoke was something I had to psyche myself up for. I came with a thick skin and a list of offerings that trans men could make to cis men: if I could make them rethink maleness that would be a victory indeed.

Meeting Clare from the Restoke team for the first time, I quickly realised that I had misjudged the situation. The points of my experience that I assumed I'd have to get across through retort I was asked about in advance. Not just as a counter argument, but as a legitimate narrative of maleness. I felt validated and safe from the off with Clare, Paul and the other artists, and slowly, my confidence grew and my walls fell.

The impact these last 8 months working on Man Up have had upon me are genuinely profound. What I have learned about myself and about men I could never have foreseen.

Men can be gentle, kind, quiet, humble, uncertain, vulnerable. Men can be cute. This may seem obvious. It was not obvious to me.

Being emotionally close to a group of men for the first time in my life has strengthened my identity in a way that I could never have done on my own. I've felt seen as a man, by men. I've felt brotherhood, safety, true and deep acceptance. I've never had so many hugs. I am left feeling more at home in the world and profoundly hopeful about the future.

Today I think that my relationship with men has changed forever. I trust men and the revelation that they are full, whole human beings has never left me. In fact, it has made me feel safe with them. It is safe to say that I am a different person since Man Up, and that is not an overstatement. Being able to tell my story so publicly and so proudly in the place I wanted to be, amongst my fellow men, as an equal, has been life changing and has laid to rest a lot of my insecurities. I have genuinely found this a therapeutic experience on so many levels. This has healed wounds for me that I didn't even know were there in the most beautiful and relational way.



Impact on the Professional Performers

A month on from the project, performers and Up Men Mike, David, Rhys, Frankie and Jamie reflected on the impact that Man Up had on them, both personally and professionally. The most common experience felt by the professional performers was a newfound connection with their own emotions, which some have found to be life changing.

“Opening of this emotional intelligence has been something that I’ve been really interested in after this experience- because I think it’s changed my life- how I feel things. And from the project I just feel really in touch with everything, emotionally.” - Rhys

These changes have been difficult for some of the professional performers to manage, since the environment of ‘permission’ created by the project is not always replicated in day-to-day life. Being so far away from the other Up Men - and in some cases, going straight into other work - meant that some of the performers didn’t get the opportunity to properly reflect on the intense personal journey they had been on.

“During Man Up we were all very open, consistently around each other and then as soon as its over you can’t just describe to everyone how you’re feeling. I found that quite weird.” - Mike

Professional Challenges and Development

For some of the performers, striking a balance between being an artist and an Up Man was a demanding task. As well as being part of the group, the performers had the responsibility to lead tasks and workshops and faithfully represent the experience of all of the men they had worked with within their solo pieces. For Dance Artist Rhys, balancing the amount to which he could give himself over to performing with the responsibility of supporting the group was something that took all of the process to achieve. Poet Jamie T felt the pressure of representing not only the men who remained in the project until the end, but all of those who had contributed during the research phases. As a poet who usually writes about his own personal experience, this was a

task that was very challenging but professionally rewarding.

“The experience of being a part of Man Up has enabled me to develop my confidence in the art of collaborative work. Since Man Up I have developed a one man show and been part of the winning team of the UniSlam 2019 finals. One of the pieces used to secure our team’s victory was from Man Up.” - Jamie T

For Dance Artist David, being part of Man Up has advanced his skills, knowledge and experience to make powerful participatory theatre in the future.



“Man Up has taught the building blocks of how to build a really powerful, emotive piece of dance theatre through the process of collecting personal stories and it also has taught me to listen more within the rehearsal process, be more empathetic to everyone involved in the project and to be more open and honest with my feelings.” - David

Impact on Restoke

After 10 years of participatory practice, co-Artistic Directors Clare and Paul have become very familiar with the process of creating performances in this way. However, Man Up proved to be the most challenging and intense project experience yet. Specific challenges Restoke faced surrounding the securing of the venue and capacity to support participants have been discussed on pages 18 and pages 25-27 respectively, but the ambitiousness of this project led to additional challenges that the core team has since reflected on.

Although the rehearsal phase lasted 8 weeks, working with non-professional performers, developing a realistic rehearsal schedule to accommodate jobs and commitments, meant that the whole cast only met on 8 Saturdays, with extra rehearsals for professional performers and those with monologues.

“In comparison to most professional devised work in dance and theatre 8 days in an incredibly short amount of time, and although we achieved a great deal, this placed a lot of pressure on the core team to get the most out of these sessions.” - Clare, Restoke.

As the rehearsals progressed the group became a company and supported each other through this time, making it easier for the core team to focus on the artistic tasks of framing the show. However, in future projects Restoke will look to programme a longer engagement phase without the pressure of creating a show to build trust and confidence in the group as well as performance skills, so that the devising and rehearsal period runs smoothly. This lengthened workshop phase will also offer people the opportunity to step into a project without the worry of committing to an imminent performance, which can be alienating for some people.

“Our responsibility lies in the experience of the people who take part in our work, but we’re also artistically interested in creating quality and pushing the boundaries of co-created performance. The tension between these in the process can make the process challenging for those initiating and holding it.” - Clare, Restoke.

An Outside Ear

With hindsight, Clare and Paul identified the need for a person they could have talked to, who was totally detached from the project, and could listen to their problems and anxieties without burdening anyone within the project and risking the environment they had created.

“For ourselves as artistic directors, although we built safe-guarding into our process for the participants and professional performers, we didn’t necessarily extend that to ourselves. And when dealing with sensitive subject matter, and an intense creative process we could have benefited from our own opportunities to de-brief, perhaps with external supervision. This is something we’ll consider building into our future projects.”
- Clare, Restoke.

Honing the Process

Restoke plan to restructure how projects are planned in the early stages to ensure they are more manageable in the later stages. The topic of masculinity and mental health revealed itself to be so incredibly broad and diverse that coalescing the research into a coherent performance became the company’s

main challenge. In the future, Clare and Paul will work to clarify the parameters of the project, whilst allowing for expansive conversations and input on the theme. By building in more time for the research phase, opportunities for more of the participants to tell their personal stories will be created. Furthermore, Restoke will endeavour to develop new and creative platforms for sharing emergent stories and themes that don't make it into a final show.

“We have learnt an incredible amount from this project, each project raises new questions about the way we work which we will keep addressing and adapting for each artistic adventure.”- Clare, Restoke.



Impact on the W.M.C.

Several of the Goldenhill Working Men's Club regulars came to see the performance, alongside club steward Mick and some of the bar staff, who purposely avoided watching rehearsals so as not to ruin their experience. Despite not having seen anything like it in the club before, these local audiences were incredibly complimentary and were clearly moved by the performance.

For show week, an exhibition was installed in the bathrooms and the telephone booth of the W.M.C. to give audiences an insight into the process that The Up Men had gone through in the previous 9 months. Poetry, drawings, artwork, photographs, group notes and mock posters were transferred onto adhesive vinyl and installed on tiled walls and doors (see page 37).

At the end of show week, Restoke offered to take down the exhibition but Mick, the club steward, asked for them to remain up, which they do to this day (Jan 2019).

**“If some of our members are feeling a bit down and need cheering up it's good to have those things there for them, so I'm happy to keep them up”
- Mick, Club Steward.**

In December 2018, Restoke, The Up Men and a whole new audience were welcomed back to the Concert Room of the W.M.C. for the premiere of the Man Up film.

Man Up Continues

Given the enthusiasm of The Up Men to continue their journey together, and the overwhelming requests from audiences for the show to reach more people, Restoke have been working with The Up Men and others to secure a productive legacy for the project.

Exhibitions, Talks & Workshops

Since the project ended, Restoke have worked in a number of ways to disseminate the learning, insights and practices of Man Up.

In October 2018 an exhibition of the project was installed in the main thoroughfare of The Chancellor's Building at Keele University. The exhibition ran for a month and included drawings, poetry, photography, objects, quotes and writings produced during the project, allowing students and staff an insight into the project's process and outcomes.

Restoke and several of The Up Men also ran a workshop with clinical psychology students at Staffordshire University, which they will be repeating this year (2019) as well as a presentation to students and staff at Keele University in collaboration with the Psychology Department and The Social Institute. Aside from official talks and presentations, many of The Up Men have been approached by students and academics to take part in research on mental health, masculinity and creativity.

Further afield, Clare and Paul have been speaking at conferences about Man Up, including a symposium in Dublin about Men, Movement and Mental Health. Clare has also shared what The Up Men taught her about dancing and authenticity in a workshop she led for the cast of Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Cinderella, as part of their professional development.

MAN UP YOUTH Performance
Exhibition at Keele University Oct 2018
Workshop with the cast of Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Cinderella



Thanks for documenting your hard work. Keeping the ball rolling is proving to be as important as throwing it. I get from the exhibition a pleasant feeling by knowing there are immediate positive effects to the Up-Man, and that they will be able to make an impact in others by talking and engaging in more activities, voluntary and artistic work.

I have not seen the show and even so I feel powerfully impacted by this exhibition keep it on!



In October half-term 2018, a 4-day dance project for boys aged 11-17 'MAN UP YOUTH' explored masculinity & boyhood through dance, spoken word and performance, and was led by MAN UP dance artists David Mckenna & Frankie Hickman. This small project responded to several audience members' comments that the opportunity to discuss mental health and masculinity should be extended to school boys. The participants devised a short performance that was performed for staff, pupils and visitors at St Margaret Ward Academy in Stoke-on-Trent. Restoke have followed this mini-project with a programme of regular 'Restoke Youth' and 'Restoke Small Folk' free weekly workshops to get more young people in the area involved in dance and creativity.

Plans with The Up Men

Restoke Co-Artistic Director Paul has begun to run Up Men singing workshops based on the success of The Up Men's Choir and recording of Tuman Yarom- a Ukrainian folk song performed by The Up Men in the final scene of Man Up, which was properly recorded after the performance. The workshops so far have involved both The Up Men and newcomers to the project.

Immediately after the project ended, Restoke initiated the formation of a steering group of Up Men to plan the legacy of Man Up. The group will be involved in all future developments outlined on the following page.

^ MAN UP YOUTH

< Feedback from the Man Up Exhibition at Keele University Oct 2018

The Future of Man Up

In collaboration with The Up Men, Restoke are seeking funding for 'UP MEN' a programme of monthly creative activities centred around masculinity and mental-health. The programme will also include commissioning an Up Men website to contain the archive material from Man Up, as well as new blogs and events. The UP MEN well-being cards, which remain very popular, will also be redesigned and reprinted.

In response to audience demand, Restoke and The Up Men are currently exploring the possibility of taking Man Up to other places. They are visiting theatre companies and venues across the UK to identify how and where this might happen.

As I see the project progress I consider how it might grow to include more men beyond the original 21 person cast. I am hopeful that this project can be rolled out in different towns and cities with different groups of men all of whom are as magical as talented as unique and as strong as any of us are and all of whom deserve to be celebrated and to be open and heard and allowed to be vulnerable like we were. It was an interesting process letting go of the project and reconceptualising it is something that I have done and am proud of rather than something that I am sad is over.

- Jamie N, Up Man



“Whilst we are still feeling the emotional effects from the whole Man Up journey we’re now navigating our way through the many potential legacy routes. So many things are already happening thanks to the proactive nature of the Up Men. The bonds within this group are already a greater legacy than any formal events we could have imagined.”

“One thing that is exciting and new about the show is its potential to relocate (or even tour?!). Whilst there’s no models for touring participatory performances (and many unknowns) we are reaching out to potential partners, funders and people who could help us to realise taking a show like Man Up on the road!”

“We always imagined a legacy project for Stoke too, a programme of events driven by the Up Men which involve more men in Stoke in conversations & creative activities around mental health and masculinity. We are fundraising for this, and as always... doing lots of listening!”
-Clare, Restoke.



Afterword from the Evaluator

It has been a privilege to follow the journey that Restoke and The Up Men have been on through this project. The sheer ambition, camaraderie and hard work of everyone involved has genuinely (and evidentially) changed lives, both within and without the project. I hope that the learning from this project will allow Restoke to continue making groundbreaking performances, but with the support in place that they need, as well as the participants. Man Up the performance looks to be just the start of another journey for Restoke, The Up Men and the many more Up Men it could potentially create.

Man Up Artistic Team

Artistic Directors – Clare Reynolds & Paul Rogerson

Project Manager – Sarah Richardson

Marketing – Sarah Nadin

Dancers – David Mckenna, Frankie Hickman, Rhys Dennis

Spoken-word Artist – Jamie Thrasivoulou

Musician – Mike Walsh

Composers – Paul Rogerson, Mike Walsh, David Pickstock

Illustration – Rob Pointon

Costume & Set design – April Dalton

Lighting design – Daniella Vickerstaff

Projectionists – Rob & Matt Vale (Illuminos)

Sound Engineer – Karl Waye

Creative Evaluator – Nicola Winstanley

Documentary photographer – Jenny Harper

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