



up men

Promoting positive mental health  
through creativity and connection

progress update **may 2020**

**RESTOKE**  
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## Introduction

Following the success of Restoke's performance project 'Man Up' in 2018, the company identified a strong desire and a vital need to continue exploring the theme of masculinity and mental health in participatory and creative ways. Many of the men who had spent a year in the co-development and delivery of 'Man Up' were determined to retain the bonds of friendship and creativity that had formed during the project. The Up Men, as they called themselves, were further buoyed by the powerful feedback from audience members, who expressed their gratitude and hopes that many more people would get to experience what they had just seen.

The resulting Up Men programme is steered by 5 self-selected participants from the Man Up project, who meet regularly on a voluntary basis, to discuss the programme's content as it develops.

May 2020 marks the half way point in this 2-year programme, and this report takes a look at what happened in its first year.

[www.upmen.co.uk](http://www.upmen.co.uk)



## up **men** Year 1 at a Glance

The Up Men programme has **5** members in the voluntary steering group and has a core participant base of **20** men. The programme so far has included:

**8** Up Men workshops, with a total of **172** attendees.\*

**21** Up Men Sing sessions, with between **15-23** attendees per session.

**4** Up Men Sing public performances, reaching **1902** audience members.

The Up Men collaborated with **12** organisations, of which **9** are ongoing partnerships.

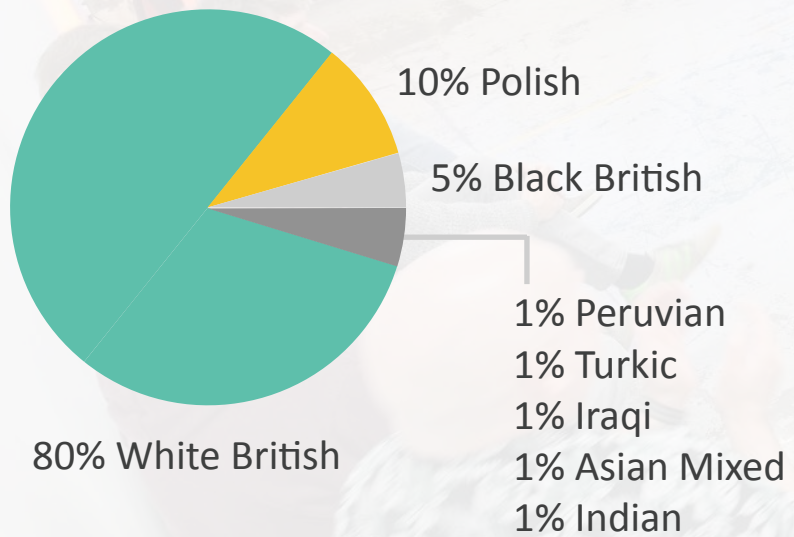
\* Including repeat attenders from the up men core group, plus open workshop participants (4 out of 7 workshops).

# Participant Demographics

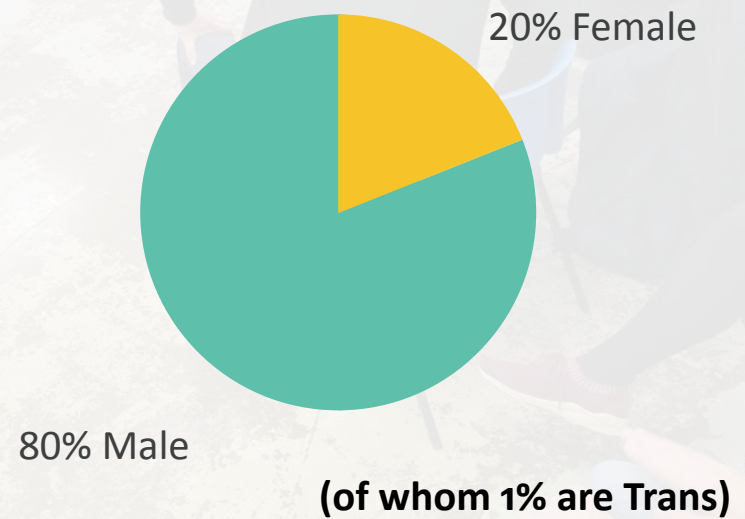
## Age



## Ethnicity



## Gender







## up men sing

June 2019 – March 2020

Since the beginning of the Up Men programme there have been 21 fortnightly singing sessions hosted at the Victoria Hall (Ambassador Theatre Group) in Stoke on Trent's City Centre.


Restoke Artistic Director Paul Rogerson led on the live singing element of the original Man Up performance project and was keen to continue using this method in the Up Men programme.

*"I knew singing had a to be a main feature of the Up Men programme. I wanted to develop my own personal interest in traditional songs from Eastern Europe and Eurasia, with their exciting harmonies and rhythms. I've found that when we embrace the unexpected and the unusual we can develop in so many different ways."*

- Paul, Restoke.

up men Activities

The first Up Men Sing session, in June 2019, saw 15 men in attendance. The last session, in March 2020, saw that figure increase to 23, with many participants engaging with the legacy of Man Up for the first time.



*“We’re eternally grateful for the support offered by the theatre’s management team – hopefully we’re bringing something unique to their calendar too!”*  
- Paul, Restoke.

The programme’s partnership with the Victoria Hall and Regent Theatre has allowed the Up Men to meet in an accessible, central location in the city, and has allowed members old and new to get comfortable with singing on stage and in large auditoria, when it has been possible for them to rehearse in the theatre space itself. The theatres have provided this rehearsal space free of charge, which is a significant contribution to the running costs of the programme.

*“The best bit is that participating has nothing to do with how ‘good’ any of us are individually as singers. It’s about the collective power of a group of voices working together to create an amazing-sounding whole.”* - Paul F., Up Man.



# up **men sing** Public Performances

## Staffordshire Business Awards

Keele University  
October 2019

Up Men Singers: 16  
Audience: 250

## Suicide Prevention Conference

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust  
Bet365 Stadium, Stoke-on-Trent  
October 2019

Up Men Singers: 9  
Audience: 200

*“Attended this conference today and this was a highlight for me. Absolutely brilliant.”*

- Conference attendee



Total number of audience members reached to date by  
Up Men Sing:

**1902**

*“Of course, my own spirits are lifted every time we get together to sing, but I am so incredibly happy to experience the profound effect that a group of guys singing together is having on people wherever we get opportunity to perform.”* - Paul, Restoke



## Stoke Sings

A celebration and showcase of Staffordshire community choirs  
The Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent  
January 2020

Up Men Singers: 16  
Audience: 600



*“I attended Stoke Sings concert at Victoria Hall last night, and have to say The Up Men took the hall by storm. All the choirs were very good but this group of men made the stage their own, and I have heard nothing but positive comments about their performance over the last 24 hours. Well done, and hope to hear you perform again the future. You are now part of the local choir community.”* - Audience Member, Stoke Sings.

## Virtual Choir

Recorded via video link during the first week of coronavirus lockdown measures  
April 2020

Up Men Singers: 7  
Audience: 852 (views to date)



<https://vimeo.com/405113268>

Additional funding support from the Thomas Deane Trust meant that the choir could run regularly and in tandem with the broader Up Men programme.

## Up Men Haka

Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent  
August 2019

Men's Workshop Attendance: 16  
Open Workshop Attendance: 26

As a dance led performance company, Restoke felt that this form of dance, so synonymous with male rugby players, would be a great way of grabbing the attention of a broad spectrum of men in Stoke-on-Trent.

The steering group also felt that, at this early stage in the programme, they should endeavor to open up participation to everyone if there was an opportunity to do so.

Therefore, Sol Cooper of [Toa Haka Workshops](#) led 2 workshops – one specifically for men and one free for anyone to attend.



# Up Men Improv

Stoking Curiosity Festival

November 2019

Participants: 18

This event was inspired by steering group member Paul F. who had attended a stand-up comedy improv workshop and found that the experience helped alleviate feelings of anxiety when under the spotlight.

Project lead, Paul, approached Tom Roden of [New Art Club](#) to deliver this session.

*“I’d seen them perform a few times before and I couldn’t wait to get guys from Stoke indulging in their sharp-witted and physically hilarious world. Tom’s personal interest in the mental wellbeing of boys and men meant we were all on the same page from the off.” - Paul, Restoke.*

*“The experience of being in a room filled with people all wanting to do the same thing is unbeatable. The fact that I knew some of them from Man Up only made it easier to indulge in the best of banter both gentle and not so gentle. The feeling of connection never lessens and days such as this one only re-enforce the wish for more to come.” - Matt S., Up Man*





# Up Men Living Library

Stoking Curiosity Festival

November 2019

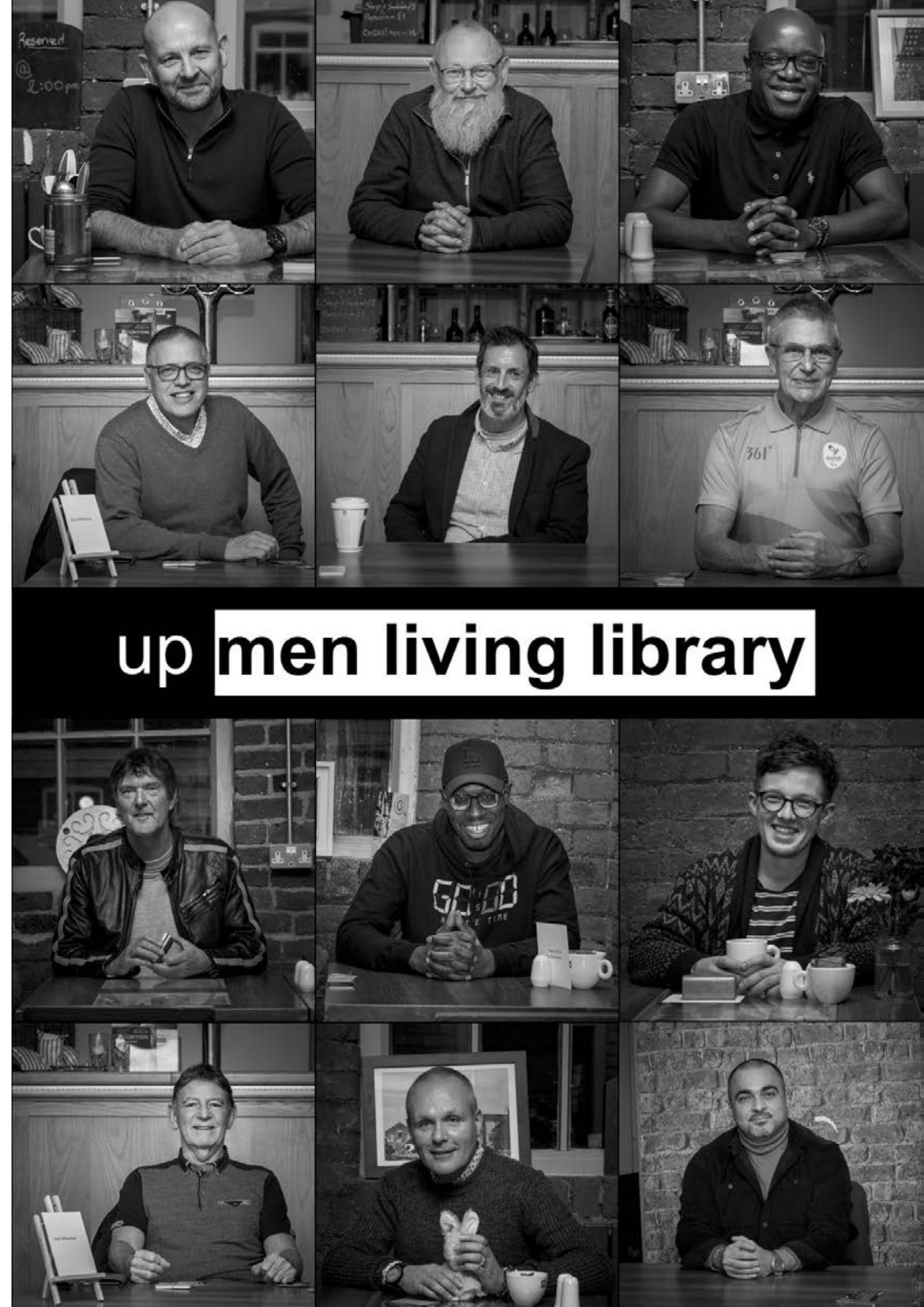
Up Men Living Books: 12

People who 'checked out' a living book: 20

This event was inspired by steering group member Adrian M., who had reflected on the transformative effects of being invited to share stories and experiences personal to oneself during Man Up, and expressed a keenness to extend this opportunity.

*“Having participated in a Living Library myself a few years ago I came away very excited about the concept. I was quite surprised at how a 10-minute conversation with a complete stranger immediately bypassed small talk and quickly entered into an exchange that was meaningful and cathartic for both myself and my readers.”* - Paul, Restoke.

Of the 12 men who took part as a living book, 4 of them had not attended previous Up Men sessions. Of the 20 people who 'checked out' a living book, 16 had never interacted with The Up Men before.



## Mental Health First Aid Training

November 2019

Attended: 18

*“Each of my readers had different connections to the title and the mutual curiosity allowed for conversations that could have easily tripled in length. There were conversations where I was like a child racing at a million miles an hour in open space before returning to the measured adult I’ve become.*

*“I enjoyed every minute, from the first with the reader who passed their driving test in their early 50s, to the last person who ended up with me because of a mix-up. I’m thankful for the opportunity to share stories with other late bloomers and would happily do this again.”*

- Adrian M., Up Man Living Book  
Title: Diary of a Late Bloomer

This 2-day training course was an accredited course designed by [Mental Health First Aid England](#) (MHFA) and was led by Rob Mitchell James – a participant and performer in Man Up. Rob is a qualified MHFA course leader and delivers mental health training across the UK. The Restoke directors and the Up Men steering group spoke at length about programming this event.

*“We were all particularly keen to be thinking about the impact of the Up Men programme beyond its immediate participants, and so this felt like the perfect opportunity to start that.*

*“Something which we became aware of during the Man Up performance project, and have since seen in other men’s support groups, is a keenness amongst men to offer help, rather than seek it. For this reason I fully expect mental health first aid up-skilling is not yet off the agenda for the Up Men programme” - Paul, Restoke.*

As well as members of the Up Men, the delegates who attended the MHFA training represented 4 local arts organisations, 1 Local Further Education College, The Citizen’s Advice Bureau, representatives of 2 prominent local visitor attractions, 1 Primary School, 1 Higher Education Facility, 1 Higher Education student and several self employed artists.

*“This felt very human. Thanks for my new skills, I don’t think I would have felt confident to act as I did before.”*

*“Without MHFA I would never have been confident to make that decision that quickly.”*

- Quotes from 2 attendees who used their newfound skills in real world mental health emergencies following the training.

## Clay Workshop- Vigil Planning

British Ceramics Biennial

December 2019

Attendance: 18

Of which were first time attendees: 14

The disproportionate number of men who take their own lives was a major factor in starting the Man Up and Up Men journey back in 2017. Therefore, the Directors proposed an event idea to the steering group; a vigil for people who had died by suicide.

*“We also recalled how topics of conversation that might appear difficult to have, probably need having. For this, and other reasons, we were all in agreement that this would be a useful event to program.”*

- Paul, Restoke.

The workshop was led by local ceramicist Alice Thatcher and was designed to encourage sharing ideas, in order to shape and plan the vigil. Some of those in attendance were also regulars to the Up Men Sing sessions.

*“We were encouraged to give a little performance of some the songs we’d been learning. In doing so we were reminded again of the comforting effects of group singing, which inspired a follow up singing workshop aimed at anybody who had been affected by suicide.”*

- Paul, Restoke.

*“[The] Up Men choir performance tonight was a powerful and beautiful gift and demonstrated the strength of men together; as was the making session, it’s easier to be part of a healthy community, when we do things together.”*

- Workshop attendee.





# Singing Workshop- Vigil Planning

The Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

February 2020

Attendance: 18

This singing workshop was a continuation of the workshops intended for people affected by suicide. Being in a safe space with a shared set of experiences allowed for organic conversation whilst connecting through song. The Up Men hope to program more creative activities for people with these specific shared experiences and are talking this through during each session.

*"I've become more aware of cultural practices round the world that use group singing as an important part of the grieving process. Proof, if it were needed, that singing really can help us heal."* - Paul, Restoke.



Total number of Up Men workshop attendees to date:

**172**

## Wellbeing Cards

One of the aims of the Up Men programme in the first year was to redesign and reproduce the Up Men Wellbeing Cards created during the final phases of Man Up.

5000 new Up Men Wellbeing Cards were printed in August 2019, which proved very popular. At present, approximately 4500 Wellbeing Cards have been distributed publicly by members and admirers of the group's mission.



Connor Going  
@ConnorGoing

Well done [@battersea\\_arts](#) Promoting mental health in the restroom via [@restoke](#) [@UpMen3](#) 🙌👍

up men Products

# up men Case Study

## Paul Forrester

Paul Forrester is a freelance technical writer in the construction industry, a former participant of Man Up and a steering group member for the Up Men programme.

Paul found that the transformative effect that Man Up had on him, his fellow participants, friends and audiences was a major factor in deciding to continue being involved in the Up Men programme.

*“I wanted to be an advocate for what I’d experienced. I trusted in the process and wanted to contribute creatively.”*

After Man Up, many of the participants had ideas about what they wanted to do next, including Paul himself, but getting them off the ground alone was a daunting prospect.

*“You quickly find yourself stumbling over little practicalities and unknowns. The opportunity to keep working with Restoke, taking a collaborative approach to build on something that had such an effect, was much more appealing.”*

Being one of the Up Men gives Paul a sense of continuity from Man Up; a chance to continue the conversations that had started and the relationships that had been built. Getting to know the new people joining the Up Men, and building new relationships with them has been rewarding for Paul too.

*“Getting new people and their ideas and contributions has changed the nature of the experience. We still laugh, we still share stories; it’s just widening our reach, bit by bit, each time we do something new”.*

The regularity of the choir sessions has been a good thing according to Paul, but the nature of the activity means there isn’t the same time and space to have the conversations that were had during Man Up. Something that The Up Men have taken into their own hands.



Paul (left) taking part in the Improv Workshop

*“Independently, we’ve organised some social evenings in the time between sessions. These evenings have given us time to get to know each other. The bonding is there, and the spirit of feeling able to just be yourself. No one there is having to put on a mask, as we said so often during Man Up.”*



## Paul Forrester Case Study Continued...

Paul's favourite Up Men moment over the past year was the Improv workshop, which he instigated.

*"Seeing how it resonated with people in the session and how much fun people had - there was definitely a bit of extra pride there, just because I had brought that to the table".*

The opportunity to try different things in the Up Men programme has given Paul the confidence to share his experiences with other people.

*"My work life, being self-employed, extends into my personal interests, so I see work and life as being part of one big whole, rather than two separate things. For me, [being one of the Up Men] is part of who I am and its part of what I bring to the work I do. Even if it's just in the background, it's part of my personality."*

Paul describes how the make-up of the group has changed over the past year and how it has affected him.

*"It takes a long time [for me] to get to know people and feel comfortable. Starting the choir with a core of us who had been in Man Up helped me to get to know other people and welcome them in. There was a confidence there that I wouldn't normally have had."*

Before lockdown began, the choir was rapidly expanding on a weekly basis and the core Man Up participants were starting to be regularly outnumbered in sessions.

*"Suddenly I was finding myself almost back to square one- thinking, oh, I'm seeing all these new people and I don't know how to get to know them. I was sort of retreating a little bit, which was quite weird."*

Because lockdown came immediately after this influx of new participants, there has not been the opportunity yet to recalibrate the dynamic of the group through socialising and discussion, as would happen naturally under normal circumstances.

At first, Paul saw his role in the Up Men as being an advocate, but as the group dynamic changes and more people join, he feels his role is changing too. Now the group is established, Paul feels able to take on more duties and responsibilities.

*"The steering group has given me that opportunity to contribute that I was looking for, but sometimes I feel like I've got the energy to contribute more to the running and organising of the programme."*

In the future, Paul would like the choir to perform more often, and have more regular events to help spread the message of the group further and keep up momentum. He would also like to see some of the newer members brought into the steering group, to start making the transition into an autonomous group.

*"After the two years of this funded project is over, we've briefly spoken about getting more funding, perhaps where Restoke don't need to take the lead. There's potential for some of us to lead it and make our own applications, with Restoke offering support."*

# up men Case Study

## Tony Dudley

Tony Dudley works in retail in Stoke on Trent and got involved in the Up Men programme in August 2019 when he saw an ad from the Up Men page shared by a mutual friend on Facebook.

*"I was a little bit low at the time and I was looking through Facebook and I spotted this ad for the Up Men Haka. I've always wanted to do the Haka, or at least learn about it. I ummed and ahed for a little while and I finally went on the website, wondering how much it [would] cost, and it was free. I thought to myself, 'I don't really jump in the deep end that often, I'll jump in on this', and I went".*

After feeling a little out of his comfort zone at first, Tony went on to enjoy the workshop a great deal.

*"The Haka was amazing, absolutely amazing. It's the first time I've ever met a Maori native. To listen to his culture and where the Haka originates from was an eye opener. It was great to see a bunch of guys, just ordinary everyday men, getting together to do something that was interesting and upbeat."*

After the workshop, Tony was keen to know what else the Up Men were doing. Paul from Restoke told him about Up Men Sing and encouraged him to come along. With an existing passion for music and singing, Tony jumped at the chance to get involved.

*"I went along after work and there were loads of guys that I'd seen at the Haka [workshop], but a lot of new people as well. When I realised they were actually singing European songs in their countries' native tongue I thought 'oh wow, this is even better!'"*



Tony (centre) at the Haka Workshop

*"I picked it up pretty quick. These sounds started to come together, and I thought, 'you know what I'm feeling really confident about this'. I thought 'this is a lot of fun I'm going to come again next time' and I never stopped going."*

Going to Up Men Sing Choir sessions gives Tony a sense of belonging that he doesn't find in other parts of his life.

*"I don't have a lot to do with people outside my own family. I don't really have that much to do with people at work. With the Up Men, they're so varied in their interests, but in tune with mine, you feel a sense of belonging there; You get this good back-and-forth with the conversation; You're understood, they're understood."*

*“You don’t get that lot, as a man, unless you’re going to football or the pub. But if you’re a man and an artist you’ve got to meet with other artists, and in Stoke it’s not always possible unless you’re a teenager or you’re going to college or university and things like that.”*

*“I like things people didn’t really think about, and it was nice to meet people who really thought out of the box, who looked at society a bit differently.”*

Tony describes why he has become so committed to the choir, and why singing has become such an anchor for him.

*“I always make my best effort to show up every single week. Because I get a real motivation from being a part of that-rehearsing then performing. It’s like you’ve got something for yourself besides your work and personal life. You’ve got this separate space that fills you up.”*

Tony is a member of the Up Men discussion group, but not the decision-making steering group. At the moment he is happy to support the group; Taking a back seat has allowed him to listen and learn more. With things moving in a positive direction, Tony is happy to take things as they come for now. However, he is keen to take on a more proactive role when the time is right for him.

*“If I was given responsibility it would be an important position and I would have to commit to that, because I wouldn’t want to let the squad down. Because of how my work fluctuates, it would make it very difficult for me to fill that gap effectively. In the future when things get a bit clearer for me to do those things, I would definitely jump in with both feet.”*

Tony has some clear ideas about what he would like for the future of the Up Men...

*“I’d like to see us performing our own shows, with enough material from everybody’s skill sets added into it. [It would be] this nice collage of coming together, of ideas [made] into a performance that people could come and relate to.”*

Tony thinks that this approach would help people feel more comfortable to discover themselves through the shows, making them feel more inclined to get involved and become members themselves.

*“We can help more men, more women, more people. Show them what we’ve got”.*

*“I think it’s a real privilege to be part of the Up Men, and I have done since day one. The work that Paul and Claire do with Restoke is something special. I think all the guys say the same thing; this is something very special, very unique, and I don’t think any of us could really see life without it”.*



## up men in lockdown

Maintaining the Up Men programme during lockdown has been understandably challenging. The steering group have participated in video meetings to catch up, check how everyone is coping and to discuss several creative ideas to host virtually. The Up Men are trying out real-time singing sessions and adapting planned events in response to the current situation, which they anticipate will be both practicable and beneficial to participants and audiences.

The group's first leap into this format was the Up Men Sing virtual choir, for which 7 of the Up Men recorded themselves singing a traditional Chechen song, Mountain Road, which describes a long solitary journey heading towards reunion. This was then put together by choir leader Paul, into a virtual choir performance.

*"It's quite different to stand in front of a camera, record yourself singing, then send that recording to some else, rather than stand in a room with 25 others and sing. And so, in assembling this video I have learned just how important peer support in a group setting really is. That said, the video was great fun to make and does a good job of representing the spirit of the full choir." - Paul , Restoke.*

## up men Coming Next...

After lockdown has ended, the steering group is keen to facilitate more regular singing, sharing, listening and crucially, more getting together in person.

The Up Men are hoping to continue Up Men Sing Sessions into 2021, although they will undoubtedly need to move to a bigger rehearsal space to accommodate the growing number of attendees, and to ensure ongoing social distancing measures can be adhered to.

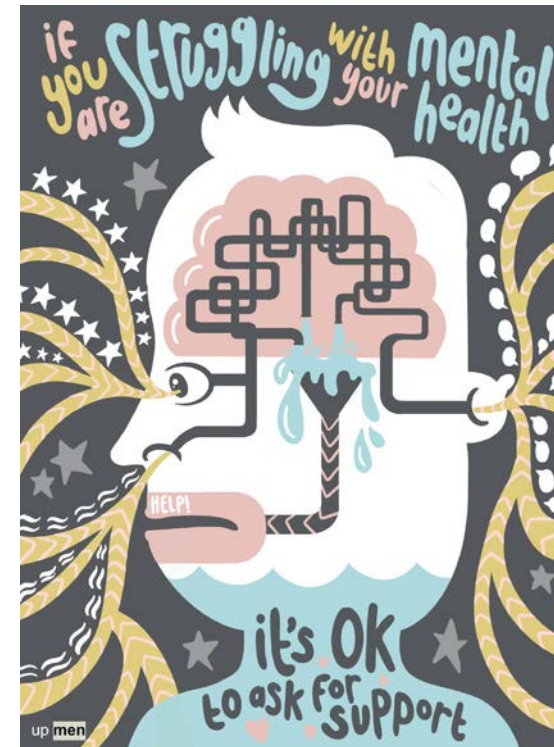


Illustration by Up Man, Jamie.

### Closing Remarks from Project Lead Paul Rogerson

*“The time in which we find ourselves right now will have profound and lasting effects on our lives. We will all be more aware of our mental health, to what extent we have been prioritising that, and to what extent we want to prioritise that in the future. This heightened sense of emotional awareness of ourselves and others will undoubtedly effect how we plan future events on the Up Men programme. I see an opportunity to make better informed decisions that will mean we can aid profound and positive changes in more people’s lives.”*

# Appendix

We really must thank the rich network of local arts and voluntary organisations who we have partnered with on this program so far, along with our local media outlets; online; in print; and on the radio.

## Ongoing Partnerships

Keele University  
Ambassador Theatre Group  
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust  
Stoke Sings  
Voluntary Arts England  
Stoke-on-Trent City Council Departments:  
- Adult Social Care  
- Health Integration & Wellbeing  
- Loneliness Strategic Partnership  
- Community Development Manager

## Funders and Collaborators

National Lottery Community Fund  
Thomas Deane Trust  
Toa Haka Workshops Sol  
New Art Club  
Mental Health First Aid England  
Alice Thatcher & the British Ceramics Biennial  
Keele Arts

## Awards

Epic Award- Peer Award for Excellence for the Up Men's part in Man Up. Sept 2019. Issued by [Voluntary Arts England](#).

## Press

<https://www.visitstoke.co.uk/whats-on/up-men-sing-p1137251>

<https://www.babababoon.co.uk/whats-on/united-kingdom/staffordshire/stoke-on-trent-1/free/up-men-sing/>

<https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/were-here-doing-something-positive-3021043>

## Broadcast and Publications

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FStJgRdlbkc>

## Acknowledgments

Photography by JR Wildlife [www.jr-wildlife.co.uk](http://www.jr-wildlife.co.uk)

Photograph of Up Men Sing at Keele - used courtesy of Keele University.

Report written by Nicola Winstanley [www.nicwinstanley.com](http://www.nicwinstanley.com)



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