

Self-Care Forum Self Care Innovations Award 2023

Award Application Form and Eligibility

The Self Care Forum is inviting applications of good practise and innovations in self-care, personalised care, and social prescribing that have made a difference to individuals, groups, or organisations.

Who can apply?

This invitation is open to everyone, whether you are an individual, a community champion, an employer, GP practice, Local Authority, school, college, business, or services organisation (public, private, or charitable). For a guide, see examples table below.

£500 bursary

The winner will receive a £500 bursary to spend on a self-care related initiative and the top entries will be included on the Self Care Forum website to share best self-care practise and excellence. The winners will be announced during the UK's National Self Care Week (13 – 19 November) as part of its launch and promotional activity.

Closing date for admissions: **31st July 2023.**

Examples of possible initiatives	If specific health-related conditions were targeted, they might include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022's Self Care Week activities • Signposting to services • Protecting mental health and wellbeing • Promoting self care to the shielded population • Self care for the elderly or other specific groups • Self care introduced by employers • Local authority population or community initiatives • Pharmacy initiatives • GP initiatives • Self care education by schools, universities, or community groups such as Scouts, Guides etc • Empowering vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term conditions • Obesity • Diabetes • General health • Nutrition • Exercise • Mental Health • Self-treatable conditions/minor illness

Please use the form below to tell us about your self-care initiative.

If you are typing directly into the form, do not worry if the box extends beyond the page – it will continue onto the next one.

Title and contact details.

Title of Initiative (please ensure this is a good description of your initiative in no more than 6 words)

M.E.E.T. (Men, Exercise, Engage, Talk)

Name of Organisation and Region (please state context, i.e. general practice, community care etc.)
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Bedfordshire. Social initiative to promote social inclusion, communication and mental health awareness for men.
Name of person/team/individual being nominated
M.E.E.T. Team (Aadil Shaikh and Alex Goulding)
Contact name for entry
Hannah Penwright
Contact email for entry
hannah.penwright@bedsrcc.org.uk
Timeframe and dates of initiative
January 2023 – Present
Date of submission
25th July 2023

Problem(s) and how you tackled them.

What was the problem you were trying to tackle? (max 200 words)
Through our <u>Social Prescribing</u> (SP) service, it became clear that there was a lack of social groups for younger men (particularly aged 18-35) to support those wanting to improve their mental health/wellbeing. One of the team, Aadil Shaikh used our SP service himself and has been instrumental in the creation of M.E.E.T. (Men, Exercise, Engage, Talk) with Alex Goulding, from the SP team.
M.E.E.T. gives men the opportunity to regularly meet up with other men who want to improve their wellbeing, allowing them to share experiences and support one another. The group's activities such as a walk, using outdoor exercise equipment and making improvements to the garden where the group runs from allow men to spend time in a safe space sharing about their wellbeing and finding solutions to problems together.
M.E.E.T. currently runs one group in Bedfordshire. However, communication with similar organisations to Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity has shown that there is a wider lack of wellbeing groups for younger men, which demonstrates just how vital groups like this are.
Please give a brief description of your self-care innovation (max 250 words)
M.E.E.T. (Men, Exercise, Engage, Talk) is a free twice-monthly Sunday afternoon group for men aged 18-35. The group seeks to support men to get to know others, learn new skills and get active outside. It gives attendees the space to explore and support one another's mental wellbeing in an informal setting through regular sessions, on a level where everyone is equal.

The group meets in Golden Gardens, a community garden based in Bedford. This provides a safe space for the group to meet, and those who run the garden have been very supportive in giving them the freedom to use the garden as needed.

The group's activities are adapted to suit the attendees to ensure that they are getting the most out of every session. For example, an attendee who struggles with knowing what he wants to do long-term with his life is making a difference by getting involved in practical improvements to the garden. This has given him a sense of purpose and structure, which then feeds into having a clearer idea as to what he wants to achieve outside of M.E.E.T..

The group allows the men to practice self-care in the best way for themselves, for example through using the walk to open up to one another, meaning they are getting both physical exercise and a chance to talk. If a member turns up to the group looking tired or run down, other members have been fantastic at picking up on this and supporting one another.

What challenges or barriers were you faced with and how did you solve the problems or overcome the barriers? (max 250 words)

When M.E.E.T. was initially set up, the age range for attendees was set at 18-30. However, the group had men aged above 30 asking to join which caused the age range to change to 18-35. There is still a maximum age in place to help keep the group close-knit, relatable, and a place where everyone there feels comfortable to open up.

With the lack of similar groups to M.E.E.T., there was a sense of starting from scratch which meant the process was not always easy. Everything from the name of the group, finding a suitable space to meet which understood the needs of the group, and securing funding were all challenges. However, the diversity of skills within the teams at Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity including Wellbeing Walks, Green Wellbeing, and Social Prescribing helped overcome these.

Another challenge which the team faced was breaking down the barriers for new group members meeting people they don't know. This has been helped by creating a group chat for members to connect. Also, the M.E.E.T. team reached out to individuals to help everyone feel included and create individual connections.

Also, the team had to find ways of increasing attendance to the group soon after it was launched, and it is open to any men within the age group who could benefit from the group. We continue to promote the group widely to ensure people are aware of this group.

Did you collaborate with other partners or organisations, if so, who were they?

Within Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (Beds RCC), M.E.E.T. is promoted to those using other services within the charity such as the Social Prescribing service. This allows service users to gain from our organisation in multiple ways. Also, attendees of M.E.E.T. can find out more about other services within Beds RCC such as 'You Can Do IT!' and Countryside Volunteering.

This project is currently being funded by a grant from Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF). This has enabled the team to promote M.E.E.T effectively and provide useful items for sessions including a subscription to Men's Health magazine, gardening tools, and sports equipment.

The team also collaborate with those who run Golden Gardens to ensure this is a safe, inclusive space that is a suitable meeting place for M.E.E.T.. The group are open about their own mental health issues, which has made them very understanding and supportive to work with.

In the future, the group plan to collaborate with CVS (Community Voluntary Service) Beds and have people in to do talks on topics such as volunteering or working in different sectors, cooking sessions and more. This will provide attendees with opportunities to shape their own futures.

Impact and outcomes

Who was the initiative directed at and what were the benefits to the targeted group or individuals? (max 250 words)

The initiative is directed at men aged 18-35, particularly those who want to develop their own wellbeing, self-care and personal growth. Benefits to this group included having a safe space to meet and ask questions, talk about their emotions, and engage in something positive.

The group have the opportunity to make improvements to the gardens such as sanding benches, painting gates, and gardening. These practical tasks help them to see the difference they are making to a physical space, but it also helps them to feel a sense of purpose which then is hoped to have a positive effect on their overall wellbeing also.

The friendships formed between members is another benefit of M.E.E.T. as they are able to relate to each other and find common ground.

Were there further benefits to you, your colleagues, your organisation or to a wider area such as the NHS? If so, what were they? (e.g improved job satisfaction, smoother running of facility, happier service users, better use of scarce resources, cost saving)

The group have had people coming through CMHT (Community Mental Health Team) from the crisis team, the highest level of mental health in the system before hospitalisation. Most other group members came directly from Florence Ball House, which is a secondary level support (high risk) mental health service. Engaging every week shows the positive impact that the group can have in helping people to improve their mental wellbeing, reducing the impact on the NHS.

This free group is open to all men aged 18-35 in the area, and we hope acts as an early intervention to support mental health. This in turn reduces the strain and resources on the NHS, which is already incredibly stretched. This relates to the purpose of Social Prescribing as a whole, which aims to offer support to people who need it whilst reducing the strain on the NHS.

There is an emphasis on exercise at M.E.E.T. which is hoped will have a long-term impact on preventing physical health issues in the future as they create positive habits. Not only will this have a positive impact on the members, but it could also reduce strain on health services.

Running M.E.E.T. on the weekend supports Beds RCC's work as it expands their offering into the weekend, a time when many can feel isolated. There are fewer groups that run at the weekend due to staff's own working hours, so the fact that this group gives men the opportunity to do something together on a weekend is having a positive impact on both themselves and the organisation as a whole.

Alex Goulding, M.E.E.T. team member and Mental Health Social Prescriber commented on how it has benefitted himself as it has given him a space to share what is going on in his own life, particularly with co-team member Aadil.

Evidence

Please quantify the benefits of your initiative. (e.g. cost improvement, numbers of people helped, time saved)

The group has had 10 people attend and 13 members in the group chat, which allows the men to engage with each other outside of the Sunday sessions. Levels of attendance vary depending on how individual members are feeling that week. The M.E.E.T. team consistently promote the group to reach new members and have plans to expand the offering as numbers continue to grow.

Do you have formal or anecdotal evidence of success? (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, informal feedback?)

Those who have attended regularly have seen the most improvements in their wellbeing. One member who has attended almost every session since he joined has become much more confident and seen a decrease in his anxiety. He has formed friendships with other members and been actively involved in activities, exercise, and thought-provoking conversations.

Feedback received includes:

"I loved today."

"I got on really well with the lads, can I come again"

"What is so great is that I have met people here who I would not perhaps meet in everyday life."

"Thank you."

What was the cost of this initiative in terms of time, money, and/or other resources? Please be as specific as you can

M.E.E.T. was running weekly on Sunday afternoons for four hours, and this has recently changed to twice-monthly. Aadil and Alex's time is used to discuss the group and plan for the future. The group is run in most part through volunteer support, as well as Alex's staff time when he joins the group to support Aadil. Those who help run the garden give up their free time to come and speak to group members regularly. Therefore, significant amounts of volunteer time have been invested into the delivery of this project, with more plans still for expansion/improvements.

The team have currently spent £196.15 on construction equipment (e.g. drill, hammer, work gloves), £800 on hiring Golden Garden, £59.99 on a subscription to Men's Health magazine, £29.99 on a speaker and £136.32 on sports equipment. The total spend so far is £1,222.45.

And, finally...

Are there any lessons you learned or top tips that you would like to share? (max 200 words)

From the beginning, setting up M.E.E.T. highlighted the importance of sticking with something you believe in and seeing it through. The group was made possible because of the passion and drive of Alex and Aadil and other people within Beds RCC and Golden Gardens. Without their perseverance to push through the initial stages of promoting a new group and finding ways to reach out to people the group would not be possible. The team learnt that you should still try even if there are mixed reactions to setting up something new. By keeping it up consistently, results will start to come in.

From running the group, the top tip that has become apparent is the importance of being vulnerable when you feel you are in a safe space to do so, and how problems can be worked through when you let people in.

The team continue to face new challenges as the group develops, for example improving relationships with local GPs to share the group this way. However, the team's commitment to making M.E.E.T. a success means that they are continuing to work through these challenges and not let them slow down the progress of the group.

Did you use any of the Self Care Forum's resources? If so, please specify.

No.

Please provide the social media addresses of all those who were involved in the initiative.

Instagram: @bedsrcc

Facebook: @bedsrcc

Twitter: @bedsrcc

There are also plans to set up an Instagram account solely for M.E.E.T. as a new way of reaching and developing connections with the desired audience, and sharing updates about the group.

Why do you think this initiative deserves to win the award? (Max 100 words)

M.E.E.T. deserves to win this award because it is helping to support a group of people which are in need of more support that currently isn't always available to them. The group's focus on men aged 18-35 in Bedford and the surrounding area is helping to make a real difference to men's lives in the local community, and helping them to look after their own wellbeing and self-care. Winning this award would have a hugely positive effect on promoting the group further so it reaches those who need it most, as well as expanding the support able to be given.

Do you have an image, materials or weblinks to supplement your application? Please supply no more than 2 images which may also be used to promote your application if successful. Ensure images are square (ie height/width dimensions are the same).

https://yourwellbeingbedfordshire.org.uk/support_groups/meet-project-men-exercise-engage-talk/



Your application may be chosen to be uploaded to the "best practise" page of the Self Care Forum website to share self care excellence so that others might use the learnings in your application. We will also include your email address so that people may get in touch with you. If you would prefer that your application and/or email address was NOT chosen then please make it clear in the box provided below.

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We look forward to receiving your application. Please email your completed form to:

selfcare@selfcareforum.org

About the Self Care Forum

The Self Care Forum supports organisations in helping their communities and service users better understand how to self care. It is the leading independent provider of best practice around self care and the 'go-to' place for top quality resources, current opinion, and self care interventions in the UK.

It is a charity and aims to improve public health by promoting self care at national policy level. It creates resources, runs the UK-wide National Self Care Week, and supports robust research evidence.

For more information about the Self Care Forum please go to the website. www.selfcareforum.org.