

LONDON FUNDERS: YEAR OF THE MALE MEETING

18/2/14

CONTEXT

Jane Powell, the Director of the Campaign Against Living Miserably, provided some context for The [Year of the Male](#). She explained that CALM was born out of a Department of Health pilot, and described the charity's 'cultural' approach to preventing male suicide - 'taking off the white coats'. She set out the problem of attracting any attention to men's needs, even when the stats are as clear as they are with male suicide (77%), and asked 'How bad does it need to be for men?'.

Jane went on to explain the drive behind The Year of the Male. There is no biological reason why men are so much more likely to take their lives so the assumption is that reason must, in part, be cultural. YOTM is exploring what it looks like to be a man now, asking big questions, starting discussion and developing calls for change - using all available levers to bring gender 'centre stage'. There are four pillars : men and media, work life, family life and public services. There will be an 'audit' exploring pressures and expectations on men and a 'storytelling' public campaign, showcasing a wider range of stories about men, including men who've 'messed up' and come through the other side, to help men feel more able to access help without feeling less of a man.

CALM is small, and can't do this alone. It has produced a framework and a platform (www.yearofthemale.co.uk) to shine a light on others' work, and is looking to partner with/influence other organisations to join them in developing calls for change.

INSIGHTS

Over the course of a free-ranging discussion, the group shared ideas and knowledge from their own experiences, encompassing policy, delivery, funding and public campaigning. Key insights are summarised below under some common themes.

DELIVERY: POSITIVE SERVICE/EVALUATION MODELS

- A lack of positive, genuinely gendered, service and evaluation models
- Pitfalls mentioned: pathologising masculinity; explicit and implicit assumptions about girls as victims, boys as perpetrators; simply adapting techniques that worked for women/girls

DELIVERY: SAFE SPACES

- Attitude/behaviour change can and does happen in 'safe spaces', where there is a sense of belonging and the freedom to unpick and resolve behaviour issues
- Children/young people seek a rhetoric/'excuse' to give them the legitimacy (amongst their peers) to behave differently

- Boxing clubs were mentioned several times as an example of a 'safe place', and sport more generally as a powerful tool for engagement: it provides instant feedback and a ready 'excuse' to justify behaviour change
- However sport doesn't work for everyone; there's a need to identify consi appropriate settings where all men and boys 'belong'; older men were identified as a particular blindspot
- One service provider cited evidence that openness to change appeared extremely strong at the point of engagement but reverted almost the moment an individual walked out of the door; sustained, consistent engagement is needed
- One attendee spoke about the value of mixed gender settings, in sport and the military, where equal respect of skill/ability can act a catalyst for change; which sounds a note of caution about assuming 'safe places' are always exclusively male

POLICY AND DELIVERY: SPECIFIC GROUPS AND 'TRIGGER POINTS'

- Poor, white men are an unheard voice and becoming increasingly disengaged; one service provider reported first hand experience that boys living in poverty are receiving a strong message, from their fathers, that there's nothing out there for them; the sense of opportunity feels greater for girls
- There's a need to focus on the basics, literacy and numeracy, and strive for 'enlightenment' at an early age
- One funder reported that the triggers that put men at risk are known, but cited an example of lack of interest in developing interventions at these points
- More could be done to examine what, where and how negative perceptions are being formed/reinforced; in particular in schools
- One participant cited first-hand experience of seeing harmful attitudes/behaviours being formed/reinforced in schools; there could be great potential to work with the system to change this

POLICY AND DELIVERY: ROLE MODELS

- Consensus on a lack of genuine, relatable role models for men; too much focus on 'high achievers' that are unrelatable at best and damaging at worst because they reinforce a very particular ideal of success
- Reclaim were cited as a group doing good work around genuine, local role models
- There's also a lack of male role models in services - including health and education
- From a policy point of view, change needs to be mirrored in government, with policies and rhetorics that mirror the reality on the ground

FUNDING: LEGITIMISING MEN AND BOYS AS A TARGET GROUP

- Acceptance that men and boys are a valid target group is growing, one service provider had found BIG more receptive and cited the Invisible Men report as a valuable source of legitimacy; but this is by no means universal amongst funders
- One funder reported that the scarcity of robust projects coming forward, rather than a lack of will to fund, was the reason for the lack of male specific projects in their portfolio; funders will respond if the sector shows the way

- Consensus that mainstreaming into existing funding sources/commissioning will create more meaningful change than simply creating new, male specific funding sources
- Strategic collaboration amongst individual, national funders could be encouraged
- Funders can also be challenged to share their data/learning

POLICY: LEVERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- There is a window of opportunity to embed approaches in Local Authorities' public health commissioning
- Local approaches may be more effective than national policy influencing however, in the past, boroughs leading the way have often been reliant on individuals; if the agenda isn't embedded it falls away when they leave
- At a national level, the issues touch on so many different departments, from Health to Justice, that no-one owns this
- Although 'equality' means all genders, in principle, there is an absence of strategic thinking about men and boys at a policy level and a lack of practical service models to support implementation
- There is an opportunity for the third sector to fill this vacuum by supporting the development of strategies, providing positive service models, creating exemplars and mainstreaming learning into practice
- More could also be done to build interventions into other govt services (eg JCP)

CAMPAIGNING: PUBLIC OPINION

- CALM is conducting an 'audit' of masculinity to examine the pressures/expectations men experience
- Telling different/alternative stories about men's lives is an empowering way is a key element of Year of the Male, including men who've failed and started again
- Re challenging stereotypes of masculinity, one participant suggested that phrases like 'man up' etc are only used by those who haven't experienced in a 'safe place' where those ideas have been dismantled
- There is an opportunity to create something viral, with momentum, that learns from the successes of feminist campaigning
- However there was a strong feeling that campaigning should focus on equality for everyone, rather than 'masculinism'

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Some proposed ideas for action are included below, based on the ideas that emerged about what more could be done in the areas above.

- Build a coalition of organisations to drive this agenda forward
- Contribute to Working With Men's work on the Lib Dem Men's Manifesto

- Develop a collaborative programme that might encompass:

POLICY: Influencing Local Authorities/Public Health Commissioners; supporting development of strategy within [Government Equalities Office](#); recruiting more male role models into key public services

INSIGHT/RESEARCH: research into where attitudes/behaviours are formed/reinforced; an evidence hub (a men and boys' Project Oracle?)

DELIVERY: creation/promotion of positive service models and exemplars in various settings, eg in public health; schools; JCP; at other 'trigger points' identified by research

CAMPAIGNING: a public facing campaign - storytelling with a viral element; showcasing alternative role models

FUNDING: A strategic collaboration between national funders

NEXT STEPS

- CALM have committed to developing a concept for a collaborative project; which they will circulate by the end of February with a second meeting date
- London Funders will circulate these notes to other members with an interest in this area
- All attendees are asked to make a pledge, describing their work in this area at <http://www.yearofthemale.com/pledges>
- Attendees are also asked to contribute evidence, research, case studies and opinion pieces to the discussion fora on relevant themes

Work [click here](#)

Family [click here](#)

Public Services (including Education) [click here](#)

The Media [click here](#)

- Please also circulate this link to your networks to encourage them to participate <http://www.yearofthemale.com/news/join-debate>