



THE BARBER PROJECT



BARBER SHOPS ACROSS THE LEEDS AREA

WHAT IS THE BARBER TALK: LOOKING GOOD FEELING BETTER PROJECT ABOUT?

Barbershops are often community hubs and places of belonging, particularly amongst men in Afro-Caribbean and South Asian Communities. Barbers frequently have rapport-building skills that help them build [long-term and trusted relationships](#) with their customers, providing a 'third space' in which men feel free to voice difficulties and concerns that they may be uncomfortable or unwilling to discuss elsewhere. [As a result barbershops are a space where many men may choose to disclose or discuss aspects of their mental health and wellbeing, and barbers are the individuals at the front-line of not only hearing these concerns, but responding to and supporting those men.](#)

Amongst trainee barbers, this aspect of the role is often ignored during their formal education, meaning barbers are less able, and less prepared, to support both their own mental health, and the health of the customers they are often supporting. To acknowledge and support with this, Leeds Mind developed The Barber Project, aiming to [help barbers from African, Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds improve their confidence with the mental health conversations many of them are already having with customers.](#) Leeds Mind worked with barbers to develop five short videos tackling different mental health topics that might arise in barbershops, shot entirely on-location within the shops; this project aimed to create safer communal spaces and help tackle the health inequalities faced by men from African, Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds, both as barbers or as customers.

HOW IS THE PROJECT FUNDED?

The Barber Talks project was funded by [Health Education England](#), and its delivery supported by [Leeds Mind](#). Leeds Mind are local branch of the national charity [Mind](#) who promote positive mental health and wellbeing as well as providing help and support to those in need. Leeds mind targets communities in and around Leeds, providing support and resources for those experiencing mental health difficulties; Leeds Mind not only provides direct services including counselling, social prescribing, employment support and creative wellbeing activities, but also innovative initiatives such as the Barber Talks project.

WHAT ASPECTS OF HEALTH DOES THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

The Barber Talks project addresses mental health, physical health, social isolation, health prevention and health inequalities; one of the key aspects is [understanding the kinds of health issues that may be spoken about within a barbershop context](#), particularly when these issues may not be spoken about elsewhere. The project also addresses issues around [overwhelm and pressure for barbers who often find themselves engaged in conversations about mental health as a by-product of their role without formal training or support.](#) Psychological safety, understanding personal boundaries and developing the tools and skill to deliver meaningful, culturally competent conversations that are safe for both barber and customer have been a central focus in the theme development of the videos and the overall project.

WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROJECT?

Many men and boys visit barber shops not only for a haircut or sometimes just to spend time or “hang out” with someone. Barber shops are often much more than a place to get a haircut; for some communities, they also offer a [place of social retreat that comes without cultural baggage that may be associated with other spaces](#). Barber shops provide a sense of community, belonging and peer support in a safe, supportive and open space.

The Barbers Talk project has enabled barbers to [develop a wider understanding of mental health issues, as well as the skills to facilitate conversations with customers about their mental health when the need arises](#). Barbers Talk also allows barbers to gain insight into their own personal boundaries and wellbeing needs when working in these spaces.

HOW DO YOU DEMONSTRATE IMPACT AND SUCCESS?

The impact of the project was primarily associated with reach. For every Barber who engaged with the project, [a wider impact was also felt outwardly as a result of their level of community engagement](#). On average, the barbers involved in the project undertook around 350 client appointments per month. Not only do these appointments result in [improved communication amongst the barber and client about mental health, but provide the basis for men to potentially have wider conversation with friends and family](#). The content of the videos produced provides a free resource for Barbers operating working with similar demographics, regardless of where they might be located geographically.

The project has given voice to the barbers of Leeds, enabling them to talk about their work and the impact of the project on their own terms. The videos [act as a seed of awareness for new and experienced Barbers to equip themselves with the tools and skills to engage in challenging conversations](#).

It is hoped that the videos will inform future generations of Barbers about the [significance of the Barbershop as a community hub and a valued resource for healthy, valuable discussions about health](#), as well as [emphasising the role of the barber as a more than simply “the hand that cuts the hair”](#).

WHAT KEY LEARNINGS HAVE EMERGED FROM THE PROJECT AND HOW ARE THESE INFORMING YOUR PRACTICE?

One of the biggest challenges faced as part of the project was recruiting participants. Out of the 30 participants predicted, only a total of six Barbers signed up to take part in the project. [Many, if not all of these Barbers are business owners and therefore, self-employed, which made asking them to set aside time to take part in the project proved challenging](#). It was found that cold calling was a more convenient approach for the Barbers, but [required a different skillset to those typically required by those working within the existing mental health support system](#), which often avoids cold-calling, and works primarily with those already engaged with the wider mental health system in some way.

The Barber talks project has also highlighted a significant barrier relating to service access, underpinned by [a mismatch between organisational language and the language used by communities](#). Organisations and services rely on professional definitions and terminology such as ‘suicidal ideation’ or ‘psychological safety’, that [in reality have no meaning in the lives of the people they aim to support](#). Communities, such as those involved in the Barber talks project expressed their needs in everyday terms such as feeling ‘swamped’ or ‘fed-up’, rather than the clinical language associated with professional definitions. This highlights [the need for culturally competent services to adapt to the needs of communities and people, rather than the other way around](#) by shifting away from the expectation of a universal professional language towards a *proactive* approach, meeting people where they are, both linguistically and culturally.

“Work with Barbers feels very valuable and there is some real scope if more funding becomes available. Its a much larger piece of work but having a dedicated peer support in Barbershops across Leeds, facilitating conversations and offering help and solutions for customers and barbers would be fantastic.”

FIVE SHORT VIDEOS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED WITH BARBERS ACROSS LEEDS, IN COLLABORATION WITH [THE LIPPY PEOPLE](#), A VIDEO STORY TELLING CHARITY THAT WORKS WITH PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES.

You can watch each story video by clicking the links below

[HOW BARBERS HELP MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH](#) 

[BARBERS GIVE ADVICE ON MENTAL HEALTH](#) 

[BREAK THE STIGMA ON POOR MENTAL HEALTH](#) 

[HOW BARBERS HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS](#) 

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