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**BEYOND THE
BANTER**
A PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE

BEYOND THE BANTER

A PROFESSIONALS GUIDE

saferlondon

Our sincere gratitude goes to the 'Mind the Mandem' 2021/22 Peer Educator cohort and Safer London project team.

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Safer London Project Team:

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- Desmond

We'd also like to thank Code 7, Hackney Wick FC, Crying Sons, Spark2Life and Dr Sian Peer for their role in developing the Beyond the Banter model and this professional's guide, as well supporting the upskilling of the 'Mind the Mandem' cohort.

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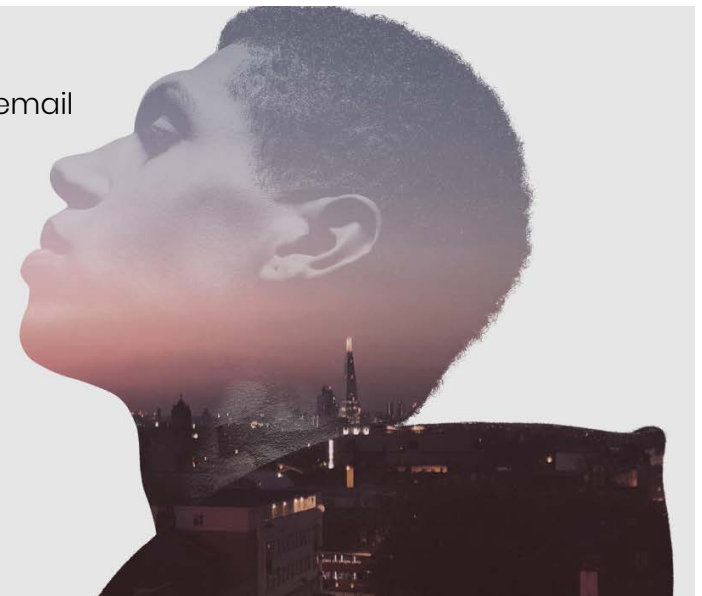
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Information on our services, including criteria and how to make a referral, can be found on our website www.saferlondon.org.uk

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About this guide

How we developed this guide

For six months between September 2021 and March 2022 Safer London, with support from the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime, ran a short-term project focused on getting young Black men and boys talking about their emotional wellbeing.

At the centre of this peer led project was a group of Black men and boys living in London, who had personal experiences of, or were passionate about changing the narrative around emotional wellbeing. This group of 'Peer Educators', who worked alongside Safer London, referred to themselves as the 'Mind the Mandem' cohort.

This guide was developed based on our learning from running this project and working with the Mind the Mandem cohort. The purpose of this guide is for us to share what we learnt when we set about to develop a peer led community-based intervention focused on mental wellbeing. We hope by sharing what we learnt, others can utilise that learning and develop similar community empowered approaches to mental wellbeing.

This guide is based solely on our learning working with the Mind the Mandem cohort.

Who this guide is for

We believe the concept of Beyond the Banter can be applied to not only young Black men, but other groups of children and young people. This guide is for community organisations who wish to apply a peer led model of working.

It takes you through our journey of recruiting and upskilling 'Peer Educators', whilst providing guidance and advice so you can do the same.



Using this guide

This document is designed to guide you through the process of introducing the Beyond the Banter model into your organisation.

Throughout the guide we will share our insights and recommendations that have come from our own journey implementing the model into Safer London, as well as resources that will assist you on your own journey.

INSIGHTS

Throughout the guide we provide stories or thoughts that provide insight on our experience. These come in the form of written anecdotes and video content. We hope these might provide some foresight and guide you on your own journey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this guide are based solely from our own experience. We hope these will help inform your decision making processes.

CONSIDERATIONS

We provide consideration points and questions you could ask yourself, which may help you arrive at decisions when delivering your own Beyond the Banter workshops.





INTRODUCTION

What is Beyond the Banter?

Beyond the Banter is the concept of applying [community based, peer to peer](#) support around emotional wellbeing.

At its heart it is about supporting communities to increase their resilience and resourcefulness. It aims to raise awareness amongst peers of what emotional wellbeing is and why it's important to overall health.

We recognise learning from trusted sources tends to land better. Beyond the Banter centres around the idea that young Londoners are more likely to respond and engage with their peers, particularly with those they can identify with through shared life experiences. This is something we have seen first-hand working directly with and alongside young Londoners.

By investing in a group of Peer Educators we believe, through sharing their own experiences and stories, they could encourage a movement of boys and young men from Black communities to become empowered to speak about their emotional wellbeing.

The role of a Peer Educator

Beyond the Banter is about empowering [peers](#) to support their peers. So, they can open up conversations around mental health and wellbeing. Peer Educators are not experts in mental health interventions. Their role is to start conversations in the community, to get young Londoners thinking about mental wellbeing and potentially taking the steps to seek help if needed.

It's not about creating experts in the field. It's about building young Londoners up, so they can share their experiences and stories in a way that promotes learning – not just for themselves but for others.



The need

We believe this approach of upskilling and empowering credible messengers from communities is long overdue.

We know Black young men and boys are more likely to have experiences that can impact on their wellbeing. School exclusions, absence of affordable housing and lack of secure employment and limited opportunities can all build up like a pressure behind a dam. All this combined with racial trauma and living in proximity to violence, can cause that dam to burst.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, those multiple risk factors were exacerbated. We are also mindful of the economic challenges ahead and how it will impact the most marginalised communities hardest.

Coming out of the pandemic we believed it was the right time to act and invest in a peer led project, with the aim of empowering young Londoners to support young Londoners.

“

Experiences of racism, however, appear to be a major influence on the mental health of black boys and young men that ‘wear down’ their resilience during teenage and young adult years.

[Against the Odds - Centre for Mental Health
Khan, Saini, Augustine, Palmer, Donald 2017](#)

THE NUMBERS

MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE COMPULSORILY DETAINED FOR TREATMENT THAN WOMEN. WITH BLACK PEOPLE FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE DETAINED UNDER THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT THAN WHITE PEOPLE

BLACK MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE A PSYCHOTIC DISORDER THAN WHITE MEN

THREE TIMES AS MANY MEN AS WOMEN DIE BY SUICIDE

MEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO ACCESS PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES THAN WOMEN. ONLY 36% OF REFERRALS TO NHS TALKING THERAPIES ARE FOR MEN

1 IN 10 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AT ANY ONE TIME. 10% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 5-16 YEARS) HAVE A CLINICALLY DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE STATISTICALLY MORE LIKELY TO BE A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE. MEN ARE 1.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY THAN WOMEN TO BE VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME



“

Racial oppression is a traumatic form of interpersonal violence which can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul, and puncture the psyche.

[Healing the wounds of hidden racial trauma](#)
Dr Kenneth V Hardy 2013

**WE ASKED YOUNG BLACK MEN AND BOYS:
HOW DOES RACE AFFECT EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING?**

“ ACCEPTING RACIST ATTITUDES IS
MANDATORY

ALWAYS BEING EXPECTED TO
COMMIT CRIME. ARE WE THAT BAD?

“ BEING PRE-JUDGED MAKES YOU FEEL
DEPRESSED. IT'S WORK TO CONVINC
PEOPLE I'M NOT A THREAT

“ “MICROAGGRESSIONS” ARE THE NORM -
IT DEHUMANISES YOU AS A BLACK MALE

“ NEVER BEING SEEN AS THE VICTIM,
ALWAYS AS THE PERPETRATOR, CAUSES
DEPRESSION

The barriers

Safer London has years of experience working with young Black men and boys affected by violence and exploitation. We have seen the impact challenges have on these young Londoners emotional wellbeing. From our work we also know:

- ➔ Black men are able to talk deeply about the psychological and emotional pressures they face.
- ➔ Black men are able to recognise and identify the impact of racism in their lives, but lack opportunities to explore that in a meaningful way.
- ➔ Black men are able to work in groups and provide a good level of support to one another.
- ➔ Black men are conscious about their responsibility and role in parenting other Black men.

However, there are many reasons or barriers that prevent Black men and boys from seeking professional help, or to simply have a conversation with their friends or peers around mental wellbeing.

WE ASKED YOUNG BLACK MEN AND BOYS: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS FOR YOUNG BLACK MEN AND BOYS AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING?

“ IT IS SEEN AS WEAKNESS

**“ WE’RE ON GUARD – WE HAVE BUILT A SHELL
AROUND OURSELVES**

“ UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

“ TOXIC MASCULINITY

**“ THE INFORMATION WILL BE USED
AGAINST US**



INSIGHT

Press the play button to listen to Project Lead Desmond, as he discusses the need for Beyond the Banter and what makes it unique.

“

There is a place for a community based peer led approach, because that's how you can communicate with those that are least likely to present themselves for support.

It's embracing the community who have access and proximity to young people who are at risk, and encouraging them to speak about their wellbeing and encourage help seeking behaviours.

Desmond
Beyond the Banter Project Lead





**HOW WE
DID IT**

Recruiting credible and relatable messengers

At Safer London we were looking for Peer Educators who had lived experience of the issues young Black men and boys in London face, or in the least had a very good understanding of those issues. We wanted to attract credible messengers, those with authentic voices.

It is worth noting that at Safer London we work with high risk young Londoners affected by violence and exploitation. These young Londoners have been expected to thrive in what are toxic environments, which present very limited opportunities. When considering the cohort we were aiming to attract, we felt our traditional recruitment processes could have created unnecessary barriers. We certainly didn't want to alienate any potential candidates.

Potential barriers

- They may have little, or no, prior work experience
- Limited or no experience and knowledge of completing application forms or compiling CVs
- Lack of confidence moving into a professional workspace



INSIGHT

Press the play button to hear Project lead Desmond discuss the barriers and how we adapted our approach to mitigate them.



Application process

At Safer London we had a short turnaround time to recruit our Peer Educators. This, coupled with making the application process accessible for our target cohort, was our rationale behind foregoing our usual recruitment process.

We had to think outside the box. As part of the process, we asked potential candidates to submit a video of themselves talking to the camera, explaining why they felt they were suitable for the role. This video was submitted to our team via WhatsApp.

This yielded some great results, as our team was able to screen the videos and assess candidates' relatability, motivation, understanding and communication skills. Successful candidates were then taken through a formal application process, adhering to EDI and safeguarding procedures.

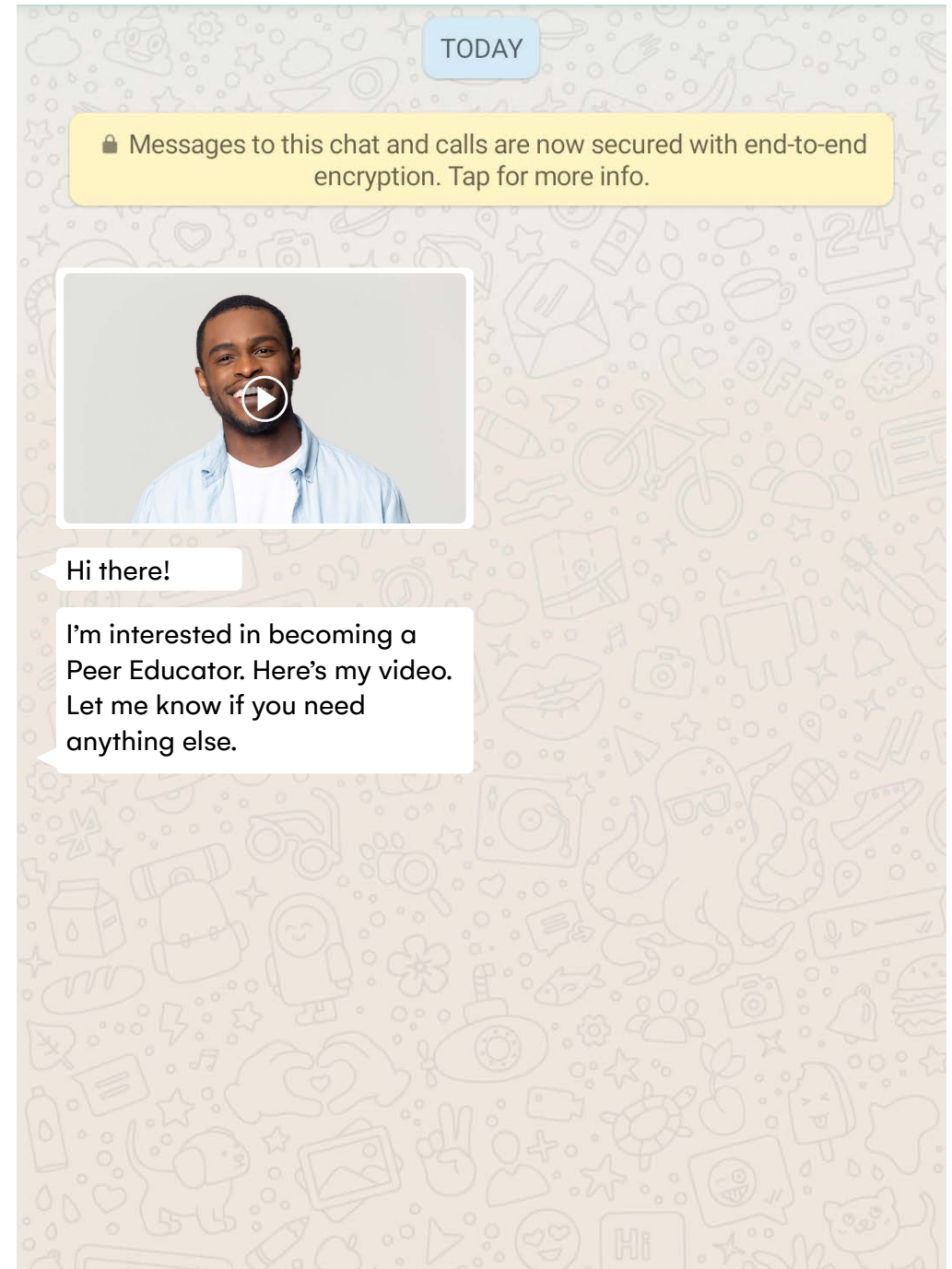
Reflecting on this process at the time we realised the Peer Educators weren't exposed to a formal application route, which we recognised could limit future opportunities.

To mitigate this, we hosted a CV workshop session with the Peer Educators, which helped plug those gaps and set them up for a better future in navigating the job market.

“

I liked the video submission,
it was different

Safer London Peer Educator



Adapted Induction

As with recruitment, we knew we wanted to adapt our induction process, so it was better suited for the Peer Educators we had brought into the organisation.

Safer London's standard induction process involves reading a lot of materials, in a self-supported fashion. Taking into consideration the different learning styles of the cohort, coupled with the virtual context in which we were working, we wanted to make the information easily digestible and accessible.

We highlighted key policies to focus on and brought the group together in virtual sessions which were interactive, to encourage learning.

“

We have to change the way we traditionally do things. We're doing it to a new audience... a new generation of potential employees.

Desmond,
Beyond the Banter Project Lead



INSIGHT

Here, Project Lead Desmond discusses the barriers and how we adapted our approach to mitigate them. Press the play button to hear what he has to say.



Upskilling and empowering the Peer Educators

Our programme of training

At Safer London we commissioned Mental Health First Aid England (MHFA) England to deliver their Adult Mental Health Awareness half day course to the Peer Educators. Delivered virtually, this was fundamental for the Mind the Mandem cohort. We also made sure our team working with the Peer Educators had Mental Health First aid training.

Our team worked collaboratively with MHFA England, to ensure they understood the group they would be training and that the programme took into consideration cultural competency and the intersectionality of the group.

Following this we delivered training and coaching around four core themes which we felt were specific to the community intervention.

- Sharing stories
- Starting conversations
- Creating safe spaces
- Closing conversations



INSIGHT

Being culturally competent was central to the development and delivery of this project. Here, Project lead Desmond, talks about what cultural competence is and what we did to ensure it was weaved throughout this project.



Sharing stories

“It’s not just me”.

Each of us has a story to share and ideas to contribute that can change others views on their experiences. Knowing you are not alone and that someone shares your experience is one of the most powerful feelings of relief.

People will often forget the statistics and figures, but stories will resonate with them forever. We knew it would be the Peer Educator’s stories and experiences that make them authentic to the intended audience. Therefore, empowering them to share those stories in a meaningful and safe way, was essential.

Our core objective here was for the Peer Educators to gain the ability to self-disclose and share stories in a way that promoted learning, whilst learning how to build rapport with their audience through storytelling.

“

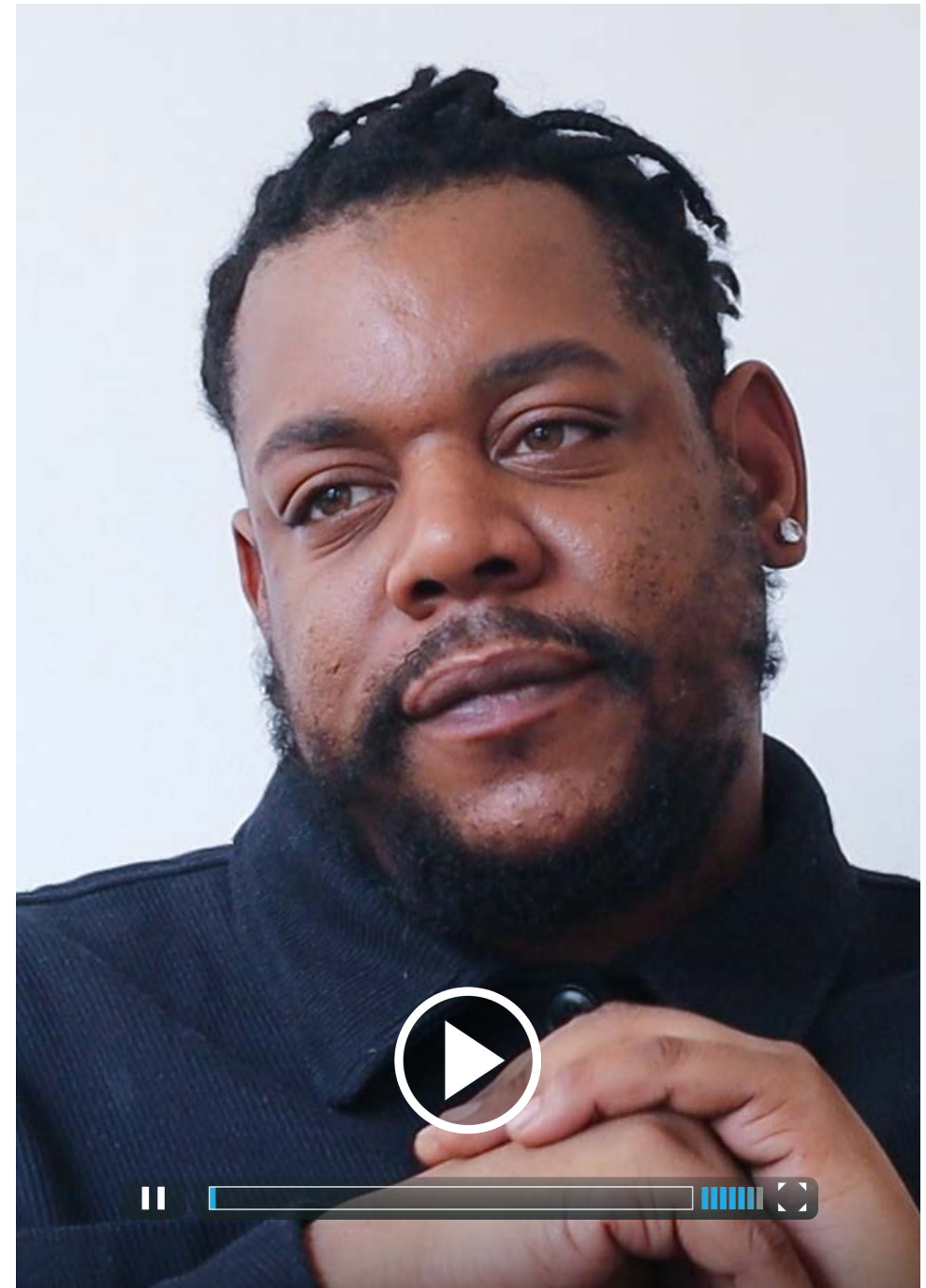
Life is a story book that you can pluck different narratives from.

Aaron,
Beyond the Banter Training Facilitator



INSIGHT

Project Manager and training facilitator Aaron, talks through the training theme of sharing stories, explaining why it’s important and how we supported the Peer Educators to develop in this area.



Starting conversations

Starting conversations which are meaningful, engaging and constructive was at the heart of this approach. Developing the Peer Educators' communication skills was essential. We wanted them to be credible, not just in their life experiences, but in their delivery.

We wanted the Peer Educators to develop communication techniques to help get conversations going. Through training and development, the Peer Educators developed and practised communication skills, including nonverbal communication and cues, as well as gaining an understanding of what questions to ask and when.

“

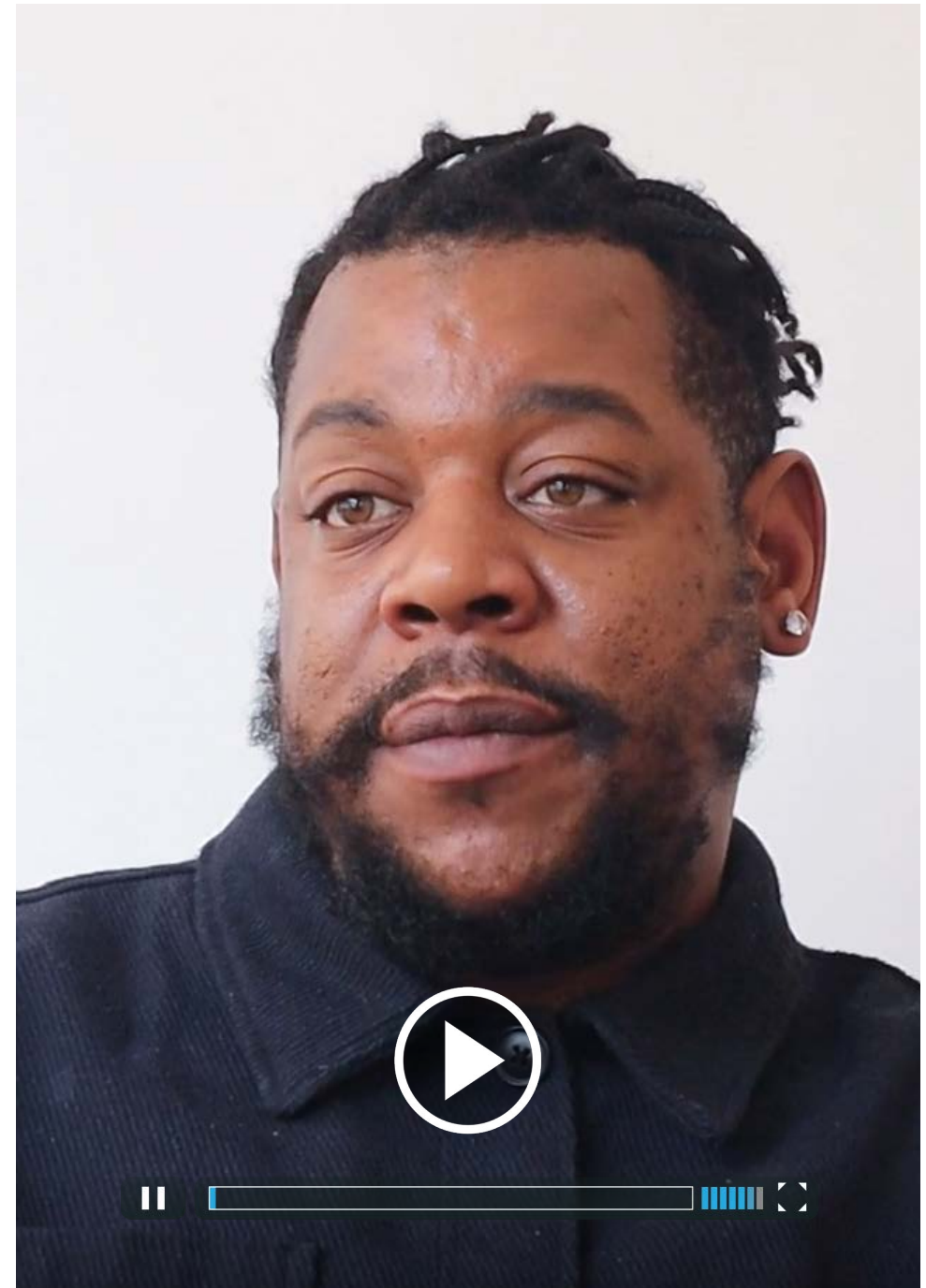
We talked about the different types of body language and how we could use these to build rapport before we even say anything.

Aaron,
Beyond the Banter Training Facilitator



INSIGHT

Project Manager and training facilitator Aaron, talks through the training theme of starting conversations, explaining why it is important and how we supported the Peer Educators to develop in this area.



Creating safe spaces

A safe space should allow those participating in that space to feel comfortable enough to voice their needs, wants and experiences - free from judgement. Creating spaces in which young Londoners felt safe was a critical component for this community-based approach, and it was the Peer Educators job to create those safe spaces.

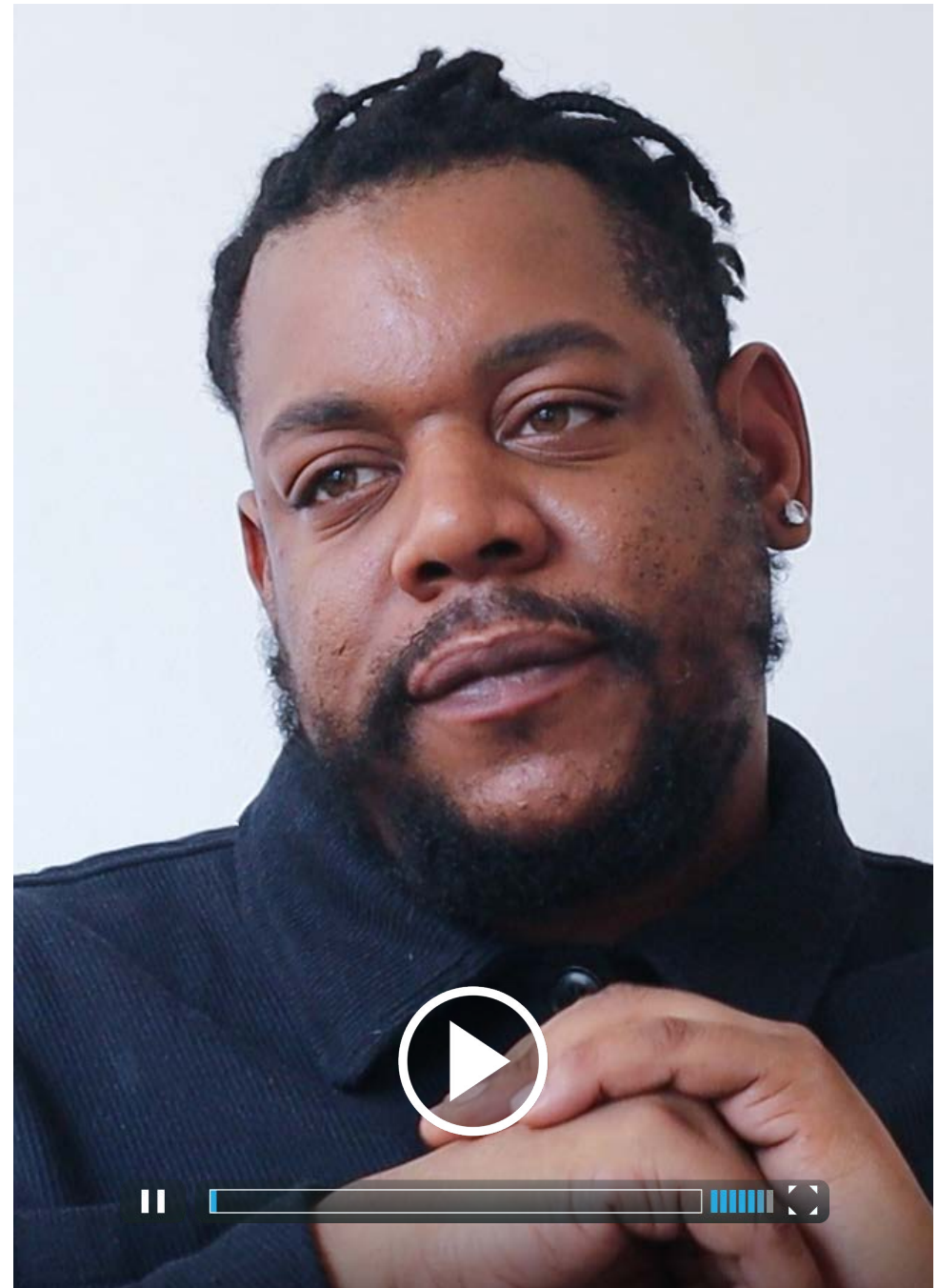
Safeguarding training was vital in this instance and all our Peer Educators received training with Safer London's Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead. Understanding how to recognise safeguarding issues and how to escalate issues within the organisation allowed the Peer Educators to fill in any gaps or risks which formed within the safe space they had created. The Peer Educators also had an understanding of the importance of explaining disclosures and the need to share information.

To further support the facilitation of safe spaces, we worked with the Peer Educators to develop skills and techniques to help them not only create safe spaces, but to hold those safe spaces. We worked to build their understanding of what a safe space is, what makes a space safe and what techniques they could use to create a safe space, and keep that space safe.



INSIGHT

Project Manager and training facilitator Aaron, talks through the training theme of creating safe spaces, explaining why it is important and how we supported the Peer Educators to develop in this area.



Closing conversations

Closing conversations in this context was just as important as opening conversations. We couldn't open up what could be difficult and potentially re-traumatising conversations, without ensuring there were mechanisms in place to ensure the right after care.

We needed the Peer Educators to understand how to close their sessions and conversations appropriately. This included training on how to close down and conclude a conversation within a specified timeframe and how to ensure the participants received the appropriate ongoing support if needed.

“

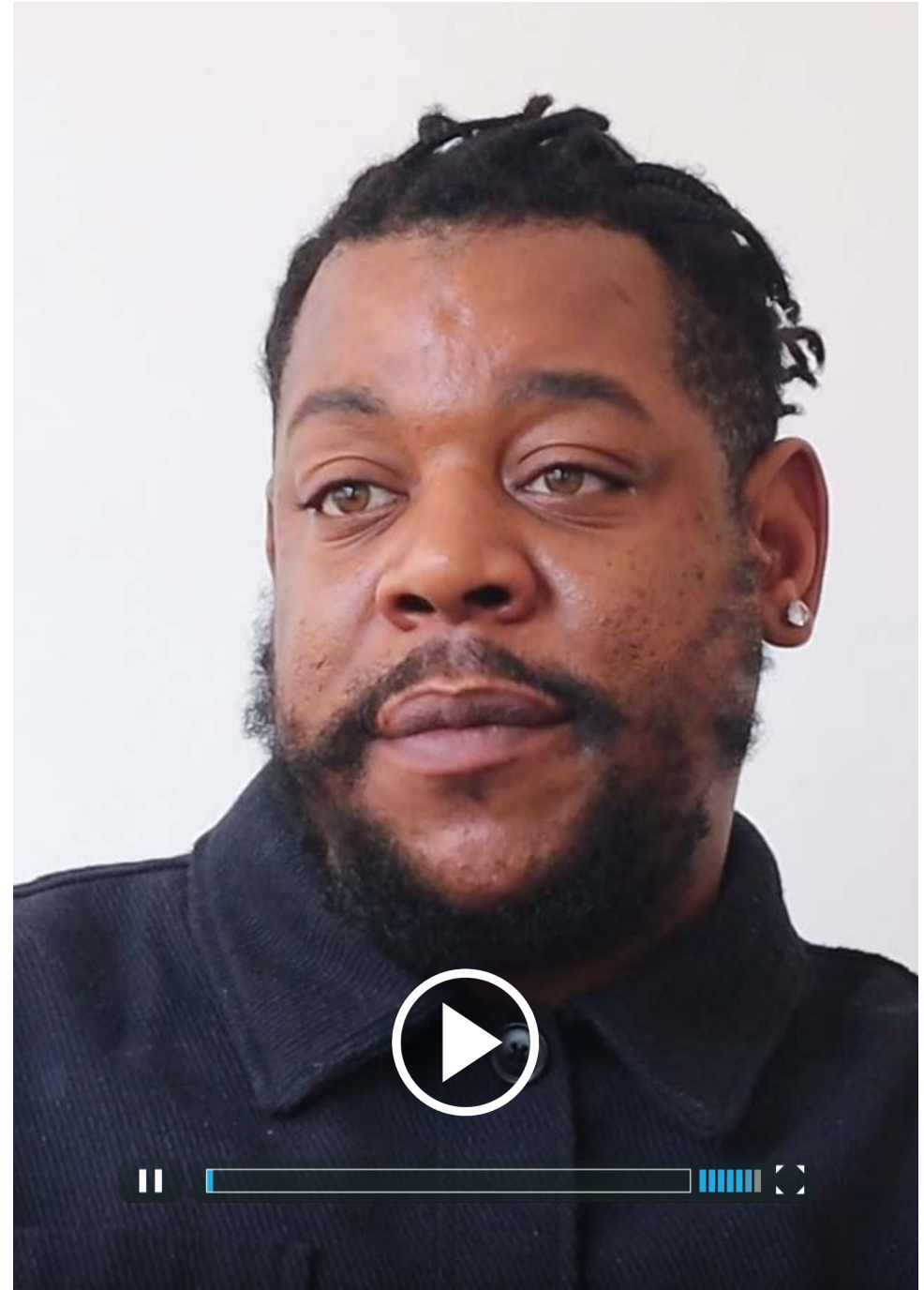
One of the really important things is to closing down conversations and that they left feeling empowered.

Aaron,
Beyond the Banter Training Facilitator



INSIGHT

Project Manager and training facilitator Aaron, talks through the training theme of closing conversations, explaining why it is important and how we supported the Peer Educators to develop in this area.



Coaching

A core part of the project was spent exploring the Peer Educators own experiences with emotional wellbeing and identity.

Before going out to the community, it was important the Safer London Peer Educators first understood their own experiences of emotional wellbeing, connected to their identity as Black men. We couldn't expect the Peer Educators to kick start conversations around mental wellbeing, without first being confident to discuss their own experiences and understand their personal journeys.

To address this, the Safer London Peer Educators received coaching sessions with a psychotherapist, to deep dive into topics and themes that were relevant to them.

These themes were:

- Navigating identity
- Family dynamics
- Stop running from yourself
- Unlock your greatness
- Understanding emotions
- Moving from stuck to unstuck

By providing a space where they could share their stories with each other, they built confidence to take these stories out to the community.

We recognise access to a psychotherapist is a luxury that not everyone will be able to facilitate. However, just by getting the Peer Educators to discuss the themes as a group outside of these sessions was greatly beneficial.

“

For me, it was important for the Peer Educators to understand what it felt like to be coached before they met the young Londonders in the community. The safe space gave the Peers an opportunity to explore their own challenges. Enabling them to be better Peer Educators.

Aaron,
Beyond the Banter Project Manager



Working with and within the community

Co-produced workshop delivery

The Peer Educators were central in the production of the workshop content and delivery to the community. As a group they worked to ensure the workshop content used culturally appropriate language, taking into consideration how language impacts the message.

The Peer Educators drew on their learnings from the project journey, as well as their own life experiences to tailor and produce a model for the Beyond the Banter workshops. After each workshop, feedback from the community organisations and the attendees, was used to refine and tailor the workshops.

“

Mental health is a discussion that has been much avoided especially by young Black males. So, the fact Safer London wanted to highlight this with our players at Hackney Wick FC was music to our ears.

The peer led initiative allowed the young men to learn and be proactive in taking initiatives with their own mental state and not be afraid of the stigma.

This is an initiative that should be taught across the UK which allows the mobility of the message to spread and encourage positive outcomes which can ultimately save lives.

Bobby Kasanga, Founder Hackney Wick Football Club



INSIGHT

As a group, and working alongside the project team, the Mind the Mandem cohort produced the following workshop format. This was designed to work within a 30-to-40-minute workshop session.

Workshop format:

→ Introduction

→ Storytelling through self-disclosure

Connect with the audience by sharing own personal experiences of emotional wellbeing

→ Barriers to discussing emotional wellbeing for young Black men

Group Exercise – Explain what we mean by emotional wellbeing and ask the attendees to name what they think the barriers are

→ Three Steps for better emotional wellbeing

Start the conversation
Create a Safe Space
Signpost Peers for further professional help

Working with the community

Safer London is a pan-London charity delivering one to one specialist intervention work with young Londoners affected by violence and exploitation. Although our work requires close relationships with the community, we most certainly don't specialise in community group working.

Recognising this we set out to establish partnerships with grassroots and community organisations. We wanted to make sure we could reach our target audience and we knew community embedded organisations could facilitate access to our intended audience.

We knew we wanted to work with grassroots/community organisations who

- were embedded within a local community and could evidence they were well used by young Londoners
- had longstanding connections to young Londoners from the area
- were confident they had the reach or access to at least 100 young Londoners to take part in Beyond the Banter workshops
- had the appropriate policy and procedures in place to safeguard and support young Londoners

The overall responsibility to safeguard and provide aftercare for the young Londoners who attended the workshops fell with the partner organisations. Due to this, it was imperative the organisations provided a trusted adult to be available during the workshop sessions.

The Safer London Peer Educators could provide signposting, but as the community organisations held the ongoing relationship with the young men and boys, they ultimately held that safeguarding role.



INSIGHT

We were fortunate to have funding in place which would allow us to support grassroots and community organisations. This funding would go towards the facilitation of events which would bring together groups of young black boys and men, of which the Beyond the Banter workshop would be part of.

To bring these community partners on board we developed an expression of interest process, laying out Terms of Reference (TOR) which set out the expectations and commitment of the organisations. The TOR stated that they would have to commit to:

- ensuring that any young Londoners engaged in the project were supported financially and emotionally
- engage with the overall development of the project, feeding back ideas and observations
- taking a peer sharing approach so skills, knowledge and confidence transfer to other young Londoners in the community

Organisations were invited to apply to the project by completing an expression of interest, which had to be submitted with a copy of their safeguarding policy and a copy of their public liability insurance certificate.

This resulted in us creating partnerships with three organisations across London. Crying Sons (Islington), Hackney Wick FC (Hackney) and Code 7 (Brixton). Working with a range of organisations in this manner enabled us to reach young Black men and boys of varying ages and with a wide range of life experiences.

The outcomes



INSIGHT

Over one month February to March 2022 we ran 14 Beyond the Banter workshops, reaching 286 young Black men and boys.

74% of survey respondents said they **would start having more conversations about mental health and wellbeing** with friends or family.



WE ASKED YOUNG BLACK MEN AND BOYS: WHAT IS THE MAIN THING YOU'VE LEARNT FROM TODAY'S SESSION?

- “ LOOK OUT FOR PEOPLE, BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT THEY'RE GOING THROUGH
- “ TO NOT BE AFRAID TO OPEN UP AND EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS
- “ MENTAL HEALTH IS NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF
- “ YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CHECK UP ON YOUR FRIENDS
- “ IT'S OKAY TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH
- “ FIND SOMEONE I TRUST AND CAN CONFIDE IN WHEN I'M FEELING LOW



**HOW YOU
CAN DO IT**

Before you begin

Before you begin you'll want to put duty of care mechanisms in place.

CONSIDERATION

Consider creating a pathway for the Peer Educators to have one to one sessions, where they are able to safely unpack and talk through any issues that may have arisen through discussing their personal experiences. Identify who in your organisation can provide this after care.

RECOMMENDATION

We strongly recommend having the following policies in place:

- [Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Adults Policy](#)
- [Statement on Modern Slavery](#)
- [Feedback & Complaints Policy](#)
- [Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Policy](#)
- [Privacy Statement for services users](#)

We've included hyperlinks to Safer London's policies on the above areas for reference.

Defining your cohort

We set out on this project specifically looking to engage with young Black men and boys. However, as already mentioned, we believe that this peer to peer approach to starting conversations and promoting help seeking behaviors, will work with other groups of young people. This could include

- ➔ Young Black women and girls
- ➔ Young people from the LGBTQI+ community
- ➔ Young people connected by faith such as Muslim girls or boys



Recruiting Peer Educators

By defining the cohort you want to reach, you will know who you want to recruit as Peer Educators. These Peer Educators are the heart and soul of the delivery of the Beyond the Banter model and approach. Getting the right people on board is key and requires a delicate balance of authentic, yet authoritative voices.

You need individuals who are motivated by life experiences, whilst at the same time are competent and confident to lead discussions. These skills can be developed over time, but the level to which an individual needs upskilling, needs to be a core consideration.



CONSIDERATION

When developing your Job Description and Person Specification, always keep your target audience in mind. Drop any jargon and acronyms, make the language accessible. These considerations at the first stage, will help break down potential barriers.

When building your Job Description and Person Specification, it is important to remember you're looking for credible messengers from the community. So, rather than thinking about skills or experiences, build it through a lens of personal attributes.

Your recruitment planning phase is where you can first start to address and mitigate those potential barriers. Keeping in mind the type of individuals you want to recruit; you may want to approach your processes differently to how you would normally.



RECOMMENDATION

We encourage employing Peer Educators. We feel the amount of work required has to be recognised in a meaningful way. We want to ensure those on the journey feel valued and validated.

Peer Educators are expected to share their personal experiences as part of the process, so not paying the Peer Educators, for us, feels exploitative.

Building your programme of training

Workplace training

Before the Peer Educators start their training on community delivery, there's essential workplace training they should undertake. This will support them to embed into your organisation, but also will prepare them for the next stage of their training.



RECOMMENDATION

We recommend the Peer Educators are provided with the below training opportunities as a starting point. This is by no means exhaustive; you can set the Peer Educators with whatever training you deem is necessary for them to be successful in the job.

Safeguarding: As the Peer Educators are going to be working with young people directly in the community, it is important they can recognise and appropriately raise safeguarding concerns when they arise. Having this training will also allow them to better support one another, as they will be able to flag safeguarding concerns within the group.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion: Although the Peer Educators are working primarily with groups of young people with whom they can self-identify, everyone is different. Every young person is unique. EDI training will help them understand intersectionality and the role it plays in this context.



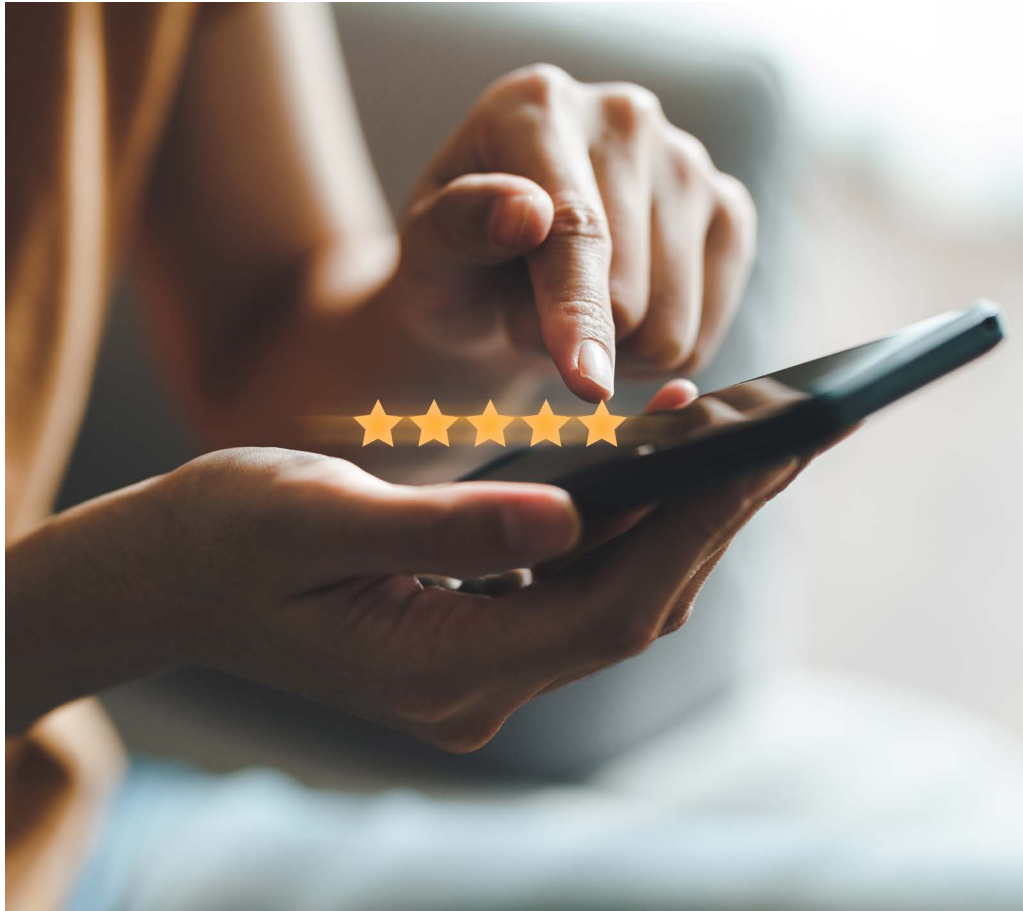
INSIGHT

Project lead Desmond, talks through why safeguarding training was so important in this project, And the need to ensure communities are provided with skills to safeguarding young Londoners.

Making training accessible

To make training accessible and worthwhile for the Peer Educators, consider how you might deliver your sessions. Taking a “lecture” approach as the sole method of information delivery may not be the best direction.

Peer Educators will come from a range of educational backgrounds and abilities. It is their ability to convey help seeking messages accurately and confidently that matters. Therefore, their style of learning should be an important consideration.



RECOMMENDATION

We suggest the following techniques to make your training sessions as engaging as possible.

- Use music in your training sessions. Have music playing at the start when the Peer Educators first arrive or join the training sessions. This works in both virtual and in person sessions. We found it particularly helpful to set the mood and get people to relax into virtual training sessions.
- Using motivational mood techniques, such as asking the group to complete gratitude or self-esteem exercises to close a session. For example, get the Peer Educators to name something they are grateful for and explain why it makes them happy.
- Make sure your mixture of experiential and theory-based training is complementary.
- For virtual training utilise tools such as Slido, Kahoot or the Zoom Poll feature, to capture interactive exercises. Make use of visual breakout rooms for working in pairs or groups. You can also use the breakout rooms as a safe space when individuals need to momentarily leave sessions for their wellbeing.
- Use Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety to order your training.
- Don’t reinvent the wheel. Make use of third party training courses, where subject specific and appropriate. For example, MHFA England has lots of training and courses.

Role specific training and development

When pulling together a programme of training and support for your Peer Educators, remind yourself of the role of a Peer Educator. The aim here is not to train individuals to become mental health professionals.

However, the first place you will need to start is to get your Peer Educators to explore what mental health means, particularly in relation to their own identities and intersectionality.

As a group get your Peer Educators to discuss the following themes:

- ➔ What is mental health and wellbeing
- ➔ What does mental health and wellbeing mean to them
- ➔ What are the barriers to having conversations and accessing support



RECOMMENDATION

As well as introducing the basics of emotional wellbeing to the Peer Educators, we strongly recommend your team who are working with the Peer Educators receive Mental Health First Aid training.

This training can be accessed via MHFA England.



“

I found the training session very insightful. I related to a lot of the examples of how we, as humans, emotionally go through stuff which can easily impact us.

It was good to hear everyone coming together and sharing their views.

Safer London Peer Educator
on training provided by MHFA England.

Training tools and techniques

Earlier we talked through the core themes of training Safer London used for the Peer Educators. These were:

- Sharing stories
- Starting conversations
- Creating safe spaces
- Closing conversations

We feel these themes are relevant to any Beyond the Banter cohort, regardless of race or gender identity.

Here we want to share with you some techniques and tools you can use to support learning and development around each theme.

It is worth noting that some of these techniques were developed or delivered specifically with young Black men and boys in mind.

Training tools and techniques: *Sharing Stories*

1. CONNECTIVE LANGUAGE

What is it?

Connective Language uses key phrases within a personal experience, to promote optimum rapport and relatability. These can be rhetorical questions or calls to engage.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

The best way is to get the Peer Educators to practice with one another. Bring them together as a group and ask each Peer Educator to tell a story from their past. Whilst describing the events in their story, ask the Peer Educator to insert rhetorical questions and after each question, get them to check the responses from the audience.

Going further, the Peer Educators can use engaging questions to draw parallels between their story and the audience's personal experience.

2. VAKOG

What is it?

VAKOG is the use of descriptive language focusing on the five senses when describing personal stories. It introduces descriptive elements drawing on the senses as follows:

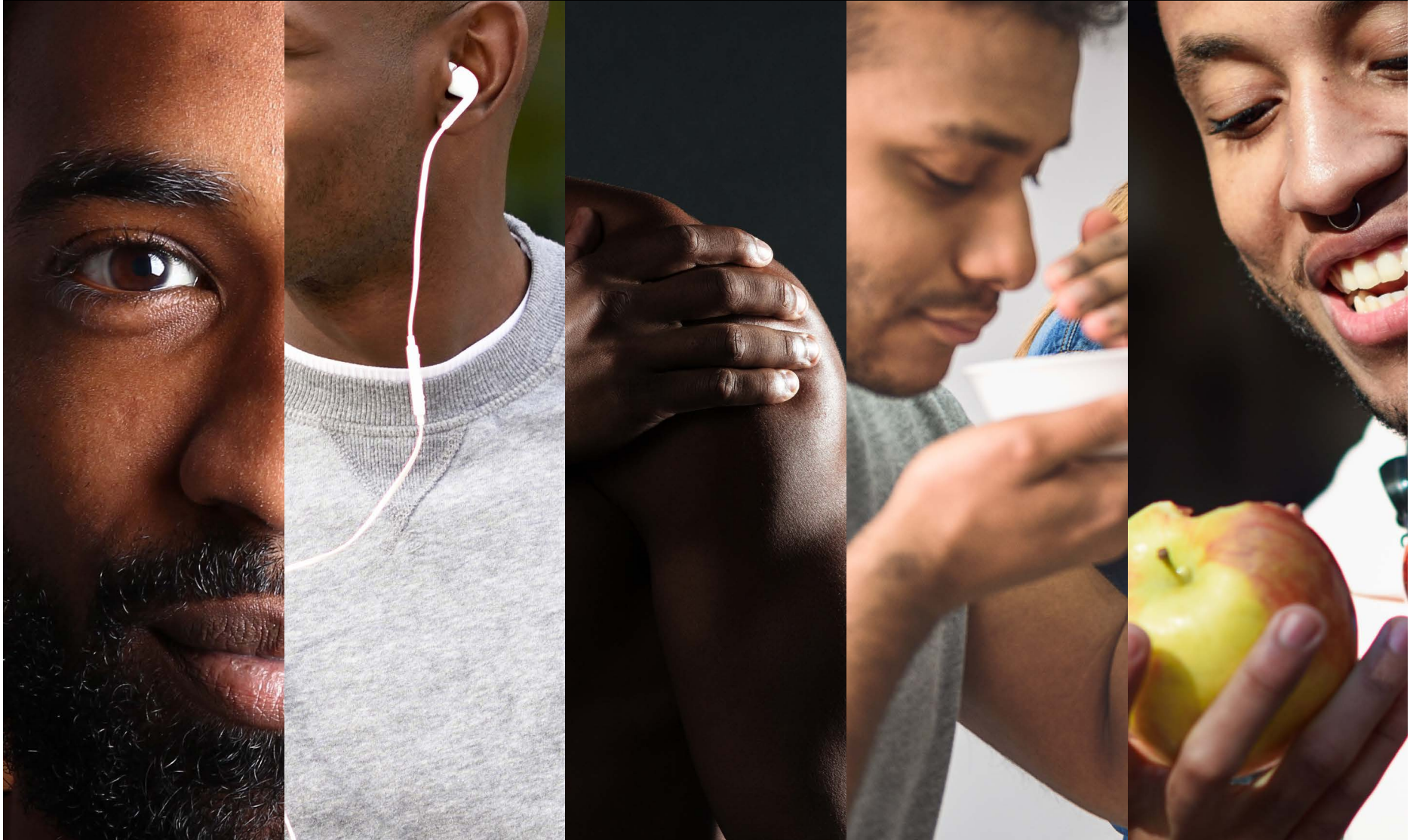
- V** Visual
- A** Auditory
- K** Kinaesthetic
- O** Olfactory
- G** Gustatory

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

Introduce VAKOG to the Peer Educators by using an example story. Once they understand the concept, get the Peer Educators to practice the VAKOG technique by bringing them together as a group and telling a story from their past. Whilst describing the events in the story, get them to use the VAKOG format to ensure maximum descriptive quality.

V A K O G

THE REPRESENTATION SYSTEM



Training tools and techniques: *Starting conversations*

1. SNOGA

What is it?

SNOGA is an introductory technique designed to make a quick introduction and to hold attention.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

Introduce the Peer Educators to SNOGA

S Situation

N New

O Opportunity

G Goal

A Action

Discuss how they can use this format to create an introduction to a formal conversation or workshop.

Then bring together the Peer Educators to practice with one another. Ask each Peer Educator to introduce themselves and describe a hypothetical session which they are leading, making sure they use SNOGA to form their narrative

2. PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

What is it?

This focuses on the 12 main skills required for effective communication and developing meaningful conversations with people.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

The best method is to develop practical exercises on these topics.

- Listening
- Positive Energy
- Body Language
- Credibility Connection
- Empathy
- Rapport
- Holding Space
- Self-Awareness
- Confidence
- Authenticity
- Leadership
- Trust

Discuss each of these disciplines with the Peer Educators and look at various ways to show competence in each area.

Training tools and techniques: *Creating safe spaces*

1. LEARNING AGREEMENT

What is it?

Having a learning or session agreement in place will provide a clear framework for a session. Learning agreements can be formalised, written down and signed where appropriate.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

Ask your Peer Educators to design a learning agreement using the following framework and taking into consideration the audience they are engaging with. A learning agreement should be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Specific
- Use determinative Language
- Audience appropriate
- Inflexible
- Co-produced
- Last the duration of the course/session/conversation

2. P.E.C.S

What is it?

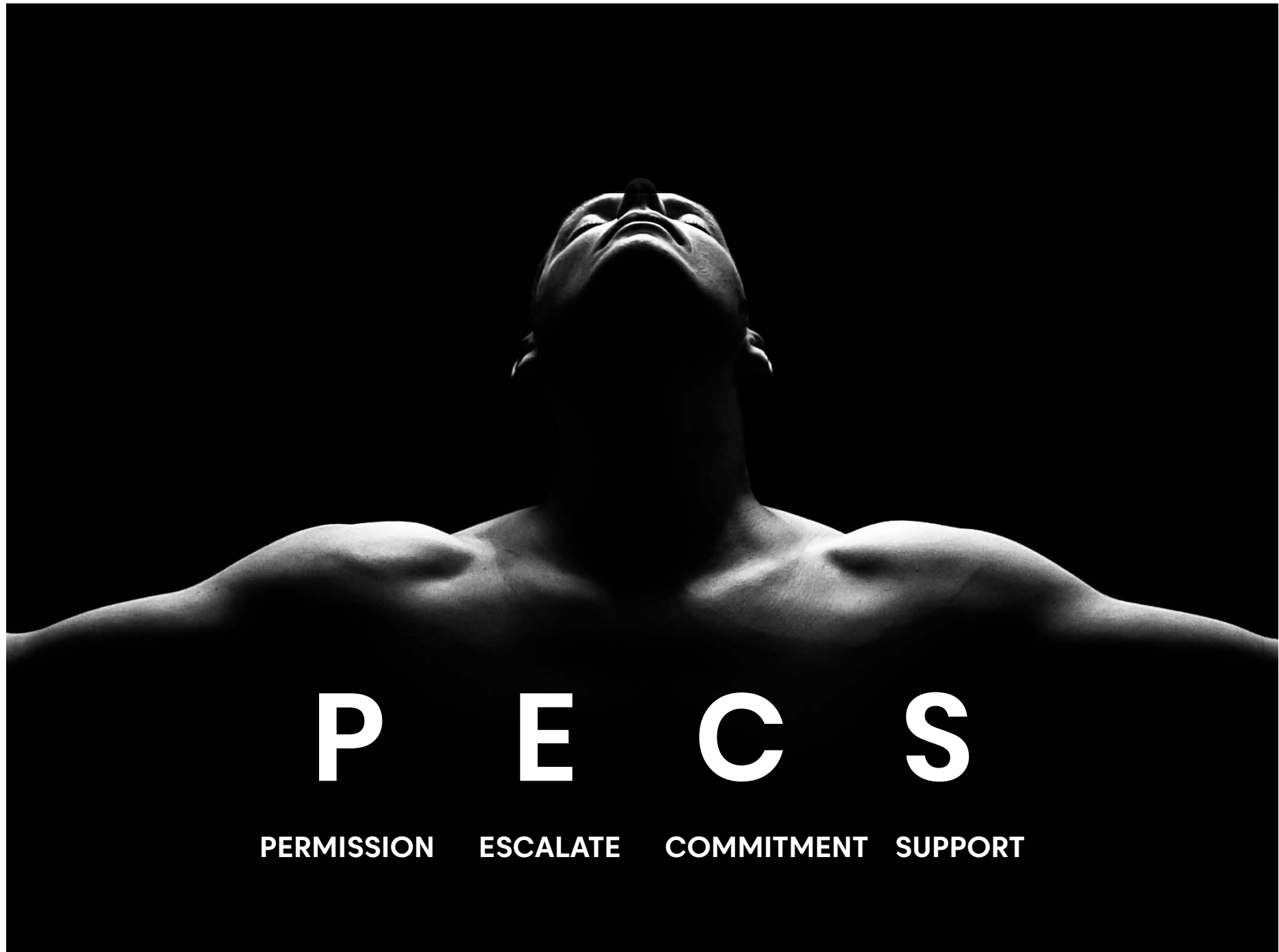
P.E.C.S is a format for asking questions, to ensure you engage safely with the individuals present and the topics you are discussing.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

Introduce the Peer Educators to the P.E.C.S format:
P – Permission | E – Escalate | C – Commitment | S – Support

Take the Peer Educators through the format and ask them to devise questions for each scenario.

- P – Are there more parts of this story you would be happy to share?
- E – Are you sure you are safe? Are you currently in danger?
- C – Are you happy with this outcome? Would you like to change this if you could?
- S – Is there someone you can speak to that you trust? Would you trust me to find help for you on this?



P E C S

PERMISSION

ESCALATE

COMMITMENT

SUPPORT

Training tools and techniques: *Closing conversations*

1. Signposting

What is it?

Ensuring the Peer Educators pass on the details of any third-party organisations to young people who may require additional support.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

Create a depository of links and contact details for services which Peer Educators could draw on and share with session participants. This depository should include national and hyperlocal organisations. So, make sure you research the local area before each session and tailor the list for those attending.

Make sure Peer Educators practice sessions have this element built into their closing sequence.

2. Next steps

What is it?

Providing a clear closure sequence for community sessions, by following five core steps.

How you can upskill Peer Educators in this technique

- ↓ Summarise session
- ↓ List actions you will take
- ↓ List actions they have agreed to take
- ↓ Signpost
- ↓ Positive activity

Example:

- Today we've discussed the importance of mental health and how we use the three-point system to start conversations.
- I've agreed to email you this list of actions you could take.
- You've agreed to take one action tonight before you go to bed.
- We've agreed that organisation "X" would be really useful to help you meet your goal.
- Now let's end on thinking about and sharing one thing that makes you instantly excited, feel motivated or inspired, by simply thinking about it.

Engaging your target audience

This guide is intended for community organisations who are working directly with those who would benefit from Beyond the Banter workshops and who resonate with your Peer Educators.

🔍 CONSIDERATION

Consider how you might want to bring together groups of young people to participate in the Beyond the Banter workshops. You could do this one of two ways:

Use your existing programme of activities to engage with your audience.

Run a Beyond the Banter Workshop as part of your usual engagement.

For example, if you're a sport group, such as local football club, build a Beyond the Banter workshop before or after your weekly training sessions.

Host a special or one-off event to bring participants together.

Set up an event and use your existing networks and communication channels to invite young people from the community. For example, you could host a film night, perhaps even focusing on the theme of mental wellbeing, and build a workshop into the event's agenda.



“

I am very passionate about my role as a Peer Educator. With more knowledge and understanding, I believe we can make a big difference by impacting others with our stories.

Safer London Peer Educator

How we can support

Safer London is happy to hold an initial conversation to discuss our learnings and experiences more in depth.

To arrange a call please email bd@saferlondon.org.uk



**FURTHER INFORMATION
AND RESOURCES**

Resources and further reading

- ➔ [MHFA England resources](#)
- ➔ [The Charity Commission Guidance: Staff and volunteers: detailed information](#)
- ➔ [The Charity Commission Guidance: How to manage your charity's volunteers](#)
- ➔ [Healing the Hidden Wounds of Racial Trauma](#)
Kenneth V. Hardy
- ➔ [Against the Odds -Centre for Mental Health](#)
Khan, Saini, Augustine, Palmer, Donald
- ➔ [Mental Health Crisis in Men | Allan Kehler | TEDxDalhousieU](#)
- ➔ [Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19](#)
Experiences from the Shifting the Dial project Kadra Abdinasir and Shaheem Carty

References

- ➔ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-men-and-women>
- ➔ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>
- ➔ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/b/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-communities>



Definintions

Defining what we mean by a 'peer' in this context

It's important at this point to define the term "peer." This is not just about age. This is about societal groupings, social position, equals and those with whom individuals share common experiences, and thereby assume or are afforded credibility.

Often when we think of people's peers, we think of those who are the same age. We quickly learned throughout the course of this journey that in this context the credible messengers or peers that we were looking for didn't need to be the same age as the group we were targeting.

The maturity that comes from the luxury of being able to reflect on life experiences, particularly experiences that have caused trauma, was something that was an essential ingredient for a Peer Educator.

The Peer Educators are able to bridge the gaps in discussing mental wellbeing through the lens of their own life experiences. Through sharing their stories they are showing that feelings and emotions arising from situations are not unusual, as they have gone through it themselves. Therefore, in this context a 'peer' is someone who has shared life experiences connected by culture and race, rather than age.

What we mean by a peer led community-based intervention

We believe young Londoners learn best from trusted sources, and individuals from the communities where they live are best placed to become strong community guardians.

At its core Beyond the Banter is based around real experiences and how those who have lived through trauma, can support those around them and in the wider community.

By empowering individuals to start conversations directly in the community, our aspiration is that it will have a ripple effect outwards. By planting the seed in one person's mind, we hope they will talk to others - even just one person - and then that person will talk to the next and so on and so forth. It's about normalising conversations around mental wellbeing - not about providing targeted support from professionals.

We wanted to avoid parachuting in and then moving onto the next. By providing the tools to those living directly in the community, it should create sustainability and longer-term impact.



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