



## The Exchange: A place and space for men to talk

A common theme across MensCraft activities is creating the right environment for men to feel comfortable opening up and talking about issues of concern to them. For some men, this environment is the Peer Support Group, and we have been helping set up groups, known as The Exchange, across the county.

'Men sometimes find it hard to initiate or take part in conversations about personal matters or how they are feeling.' explains Andy Wood, who leads MensCraft work in this area. 'It can help to be in a space where the whole purpose of meeting is to share and discuss common experiences and emotions, listen to other men and get different views.'

The need for such groups has been amply demonstrated in Sheringham where an Exchange for men seeking peer support around their mental health and addiction issues has been running fortnightly since January. Andrew Pegg, who set up the Sheringham Exchange, said 'Coastal towns such as Sheringham can be quite lonely places, particularly if you are new to the area and not connected to the local community. There are not many places or opportunities for men to get together to talk about the things that are weighing them down and the pressures of ordinary life.' says Andrew.

After advertising the group on the Sheringham Community Facebook Page and on posters around the town, 12 men turned up for the first session. Three months in, the group still attracts 6-7 regular attendees with new enquiries coming in each week. A WhatsApp group has also been set up to provide additional support and connection between meetings.

'Men attending the Sheringham Exchange do so for a variety of reasons, but there are some common themes including mental and physical health difficulties, isolation, addiction, bereavement or having experienced life-changing or traumatic events.' continues Andrew. 'Some men are used to talking about their experiences while others are new to sharing, so it can give them confidence to open up. Each man has something to offer in terms of their advice and experiences; it is never a one-way street.'

Exchanges focusing on other themes such as parenting or the trials and tribulations of everyday life, are now running in Norwich and Diss, and MensCraft are keen to support more men to set up other peer support groups. We can help with finding and funding venues, publicity and give guidance on running the groups.

If you are interested in joining any of the current peer support groups, would like to set up an Exchange in your area, contact Andy Wood.