

## **Written evidence submitted by Future Men (MRS0281)**

### **Our Vision**

A better future for every boy, every man and everyone.

### **Our Mission**

To inspire boys and men to become dynamic future men, by giving them the confidence to discover what it means to be a man.

### **OUR STORY**

Founded in 1988 as Working With Men, Future Men is a multi-award-winning specialist charity that supports boys and men along the path to becoming dynamic future men, whilst addressing the stereotypes around masculinity and engaging in the wider conversation of what it means to be a man.

### **WHY WE'RE HERE**

How, and what boys and men learn about being a man affects how they manage their lives and relationships. It also affects how they feel about themselves. Many boys and men still learn that being dominant and aggressive are necessary parts of being a man and find it hard to resist overwhelming peer pressure to take part in risk taking behaviour. These pressures during adolescence and other transitional times in life, can have harmful consequences for both men themselves and wider society.

### **WHAT WE DO**

We support boys and men from childhood to 25+ to help them become dynamic and healthy future men. Through our practice-led services, we encourage boys and men to explore, celebrate and build on the seven characteristics that we believe contribute to positive masculinity. These are:

Resilience

Able to recover when things go wrong.

Inclusiveness

Open to include all different people.

Reflectiveness

Learning from things that happen to you.

Empathy

Caring for others.

Resourcefulness

Able to make the best of what you have.

Curiosity

Interested in the world around you.

Non-violence

Can solve problems without hurting others.

We also advocate for boys and men through influencing policy and practice, whilst addressing the stereotypes around masculinity and engaging in the wider conversation of what it means to be a man. Our work addresses some of the biggest societal issues facing this group, such as low education attainment, poor mental health and youth violence.

Check our website for further details [www.futuremen.org](http://www.futuremen.org)

**Below is a snapshot of anecdotal reports, case studies and professional assessments/summaries of how our work has changed and is now developing - from our practitioners working directly with Boys and Men across our service delivery areas**

#### **Youth Hubs Team (Westminster 8-25 yrs old)**

- Boredom - Which may cause social media behaviour to change, may cause behaviour in their local community to change or stay the same which can both be alarming during this pandemic. Some Young people may not have wifi at home, no electronic devices. Gang tension increasing
- Disturbed Routine - A lot of Young people miss school, some young people miss a healthy routine, some young people are not doing any learning or exercise, some miss healthy relationships and face to face contact with teachers/mentors/youth workers, miss attending youth clubs and socialising, some have lost their jobs, Or don't know what is to happen next with their education. Some are are forced to stay in an unsafe/unfamiliar environment. some are forced to be around negative relationships. Some young people are carers or becoming carers from living with vulnerable young or old. Some are away from girlfriend/boyfriend and missing them
- Lack of awareness - Even though it is on the news every day a lot of young people not accessing Covid - 19 information which is causing some young people to become anxious and some young people don't care enough about it. Some parents/carers lack awareness, allowing young people to not follow Government's requirements.
- Lockdown - Cabin fever, imprisonment, bored is some of the feedback with have got about the lockdown. Anxious from not knowing how long till this is over.
- Life after the Pandemic - Will life ever be the same for this generation for this generation and will this invent a new approach to education. Some young people will be outside more looking for things to do. Anxious from not knowing what is next

## **Community outreach and engagement Team. (Communities) Westminster, RBKC aged 11-25)**

- The majority of the boys that I am currently working with are adhering to the guidelines set out by the government. The boys that we had concerns about with regards to involvement in “gangs” and anti-social behaviour are actually keeping themselves and their families safe. One dad actually thanked Corona for keeping son at home; parent say’s son looks healthier, is actually eating home cooked food, and is showing improved communication with the family.
- We have had a case where one of the young men we have worked with in the past was found by police after being missing for around two months. However, when he was found he gave the name address and contact details of another service user. Luckily the service user has been at home with his family throughout the lockdown and this was verified with police when they contacted.
- Boredom is something that has come up as a topic of conversation but having said that the boys are gaming online which does keep them in communication with peers from school and the community. Where boredom is the case I do speak to them about exercising as a way of breaking up their day and also benefitting health wise.
- One parent has disclosed that the relationship with her son is strained at the moment and had sent him to his grandparents for a bit of respite; I was initially concerned that he was sent to his grandparents by himself but it was confirmed that his grandfather had come to pick him up. This particular parent has also asked for support around getting her son to do the work that school is sending out for him to do.
- One parent has actually inquired as to whether I can video call her son.
- A couple of the older boys that I still have contact with have not responded to my calls.
- Many are asking questions about the future; ie schools reopening and courts system.

On the whole the young men and families that I have been in contact with are showing resilience in the face of our current situation and there are no major concerns.

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of routine going to bed at all hours of the night
- Low motivation to complete school work
- When staying at home a lot of eating and gaming

- A lot of young people are still going out as normal
  - A lot more arrests for drugs
  - Parents having to be parents
  - Bored
  - Engage better with some sort of face to face communication rather than phone call. (whats app, zoom etc)
  - Less gang on gang issues
  - Young men feel targeted by police in regards to stop and search more so than ever before
  - Some of them have benefited greatly by parents being at home
- \*Lack of engagement ( Minimum input during phone meets and not responsive to messages)
- \*Lack of routine (Sleeping and waking)
- \* Low motivation to work
- \* Gaming
- \*Bored

## **Boys Development Team (Schools ages 10- 15 years)**

### **Wandsworth**

In role of Boys Development Programme Co-ordinator for Wandsworth our services have currently been adapted to provide support in and outside of school working around issues created by the current Pandemic Covid 19. I am supporting approximately 30 boys via 1:1 support over the phone from 3 schools in Wandsworth (2 Battersea, 1 Tooting).

This transition has not been easy on the families and young people of Wandsworth borough with the lack of provisions already within communities but through sheer motivation to provide for their children parent's are doing their utmost to provide and support their children and working in unison with the services Future Men provides is one way families are managing through the times.

In the 3 schools I am collaborating with there are common themes families are experiencing:

- Lack of personal space or private space due to siblings or members self-isolating together
- Difficulties getting food and amenities, so use of Food vouchers is vital from schools
- Where possible families have sent young people to school to still receive meals as cannot financially afford to keep home and resupply food cupboards regularly
- Families heavily reliant on schools for provisions such as Laptops/Tablets
- In-family fighting leading to physical conflict and in some cases police involvement

- Drugs substance abuse due to peer influence
- Young people confused or misled on information of Covid 19 not following guidelines and breaking curfew placing families and self at risk
- Heightened frustration in homes due to formation of negative dynamics and communication breakdown within families.
- Female single parents' struggling to manage behaviour requiring external support from males such as Future Men Mentoring support.

#### Case study A

Child D 16 year old (year 11) was arrested on 1<sup>st</sup> week of April; Breaking curfew and involvement in illegal activities with peers resulting in arrest and awaiting trial. Child A is now on a tag limiting ability to travel and perform everyday tasks.

Child A states that he made decision to go out as could not manage being indoors at home with father, seeing friends outside on social media and Early news information suggested young people were not in danger of becoming ill from Virus.

Child A and father relationship is deteriorating as tensions in home rise and await sentencing, Child A is in limbo over options (College/Sixth form) as reflects on actions and possible lifestyle changes to come...

#### Case study B

Child J 16 year old (year 11) has been placed in temporary accommodation with 2 siblings and mother. Was removed from home as has become to dangerous as known to people who may want to harm family as older brother is gang affiliated.

While corona virus outbreak started family was living in Travel lodge (B and B style) and was moved into temporary accommodation but had to travel from Wandsworth to Finsbury Park to pick up keys exposing self to health risk from general public.

Family has found time in isolation particularly hard as have increased in fighting and conflict within home, a complete breakdown of respect for Mother and authority; Police arrived at house after neighbour complaints about noise. Child J was confrontational with police and involved in incident attacking elder sister out of frustration.

No provisions to access Internet broadband in temporary accommodation so cannot access school work as requires laptop.

## Case study C

Child N 16 years old (year 11) long term substance abuse issues, de-motivation to engage with school work as unaware of what future holds and no clear answers on how GCSEs will be granted.

Emotions within house hold have lead to this individual acting and responding out of frustration directly linked to Covid 19 Curfew:

- Birthday was not allowed outdoors but had strong desire to meet friends so broke curfew, was picked up by police and was in possession of cannabis. Returned home with caution
- As young person feels healthy and does not have proper understanding of Covid 19 as information has been confusing from government and not easy to assimilate as a young person
- Young people still gathering in groups putting families at risk just so can have time with friends and interact with familiar peers who understand what they are going through.

Lately has been increase in meetings assessing young peoples status's Child in Need or Child Protection as families are struggling to manage and support young people within own homes, lack of support provided by social workers or no support at all depending on how long have had regular social worker known to family.

Also increase in logging concerns and logging chronology of less concerning activities to use as evidence in cases to help families get support and LEA's realise what needs to be put in place to aid positive decision making and experiences for young people.

Additional Evidence available upon request.

### Southwark

- **Lack of resources to complete work online** – some boys are doing home learning on their phone and in one case 4 children are having to share 1 laptop.
- 1 boy was only able to see his mum through a contact centre. The **contact centre has closed** and he is struggling with not being able to see her face-to-face
- Several boys who have been going through **managed moves have had this postponed**, which has caused an extra layer of strain on the relationship between the boys and the school.
- Some instances of boys who did not have much trouble in school, but are **struggling with relationships within the household** and having to spend so much time at home

### Lambeth

My clients are generally aged 10 and 11 so these observations cover that age group

The main issues seem to be:

- Boredom
- Lack of routine
- Very late nights and late to rise

The boys who seem to be coping best are those whose parent/s/carer/s are providing some sort of routine. This can be as simple as the requirement of the child to complete and display one piece of homework daily or as sophisticated as a daily schedule incorporating schoolwork, exercise, chores and free time: Whatever works for each family and their children. Children and parents each show strain when there are only loose expectations of the child to vary their activity and parents chastise children when they overindulge in screen time or stay up too late. Most young people naturally lack the self discipline to limit their use of technology, especially if they not have achievable tasks or goals. However, those given even a little routine, guidance and encouragement have proved resilient and buoyant even if they are spending 'too long' using technology for play.

### **Westminster**

My boys are in both Yr6 & Yr7. The majority of them are quite bored and not enjoying the idea of being at home and unable to go out.

Due to a lack of structure to their day, at least two of them are sleeping sporadically, and going to be quite late too.

Some are using the time to get on with their work, whilst others have dived into 'gaming' – some have found a balance between the two and a couple of them have not done any work at all.

On a more positive note, a few of my Yr6 boys have taken up things like drawing and crafting (one boy has made ALL the paper airplanes EVER), and these boys in particular are quite upbeat during phone calls. Their parents are also engaging during calls and often have a chat with me separately especially now since it's Ramadan.

### **Fathers Development Team (Westminster, Lewisham, Southwark - all ages)**

- Reducing the number of interventions on a face to face basis. Many dads feel more comfortable speaking about their concerns and experiences on a 1:1 basis and not all are comfortable speaking on phone/video.

- Making Dads feel Powerless, especially when it has come to contact with their child. They want to respect the Gov recommendations, but when they ask to have contact with their child it has caused a lot of arguments between parents.
- One father is aware that he is unable to have contact with his child as the SW has insisted that this happen due to Covid 19, however the mother who resides in a M&B unit has been having her friends around and taking child out. Mother has asked for money to be dropped off at the unit, but that he cannot have contact with his child. He is having great difficulty understanding this (as being fair, just, or right)
- Before the crisis he would have contact 3x per week, now he has none and SW is still making him wait until crisis is over before this can be resumed.
- Fathers feeling fearful that not only are they NOT making an income, and they do not see any positive light at the end of the tunnel once the crisis is over. Indeed, they feel they will be in a worse state of not being able to provide for their family and themselves when the crisis is over and are becoming very stressed due to this. Looking for work and being NEET has been an ongoing struggle for some who now fear it will be worse.
- The heightened tension of being in a Lockdown situation which has never happened in their lives has been difficult to manage and very stressful for some of the YFs. Isolation has been a key factor in making them feel this way, and so many have been rebelling due to this and going out to meet with friends and family where they can be exposed, if not adhering to gov advice.

### **Case study**

A real-life scenario:

(Client X) is a father to a 4 years child, the child lives with mum, Father is not allowed to contact the mother.

During my routine calls to check on clients' wellbeing, he expressed his desire to contact his child, he wants to do that whilst adhering to the rules utilizing the right channels as he is keen not to break any orders. (07/04/2020)

During the lockdown caused by covid19 which has created unusual circumstances for all, he felt really stressed that he cannot contact his child and has limited or no update.

I first checked on his wellbeing and if he is generally ok, he assured me that he is ok and that his girlfriend and him look after each other, however he misses his child greatly.

(Client X) expressed the importance to contact his child and asked if it possible to do so via social media video calls, I asked if he would agree to me contacting his social worker to ask for feedback and advise. Which he agreed.

An email was sent to the SW highlighting the concern and asking for advice (07/04/2020)

SW replied that the contact centre are trying to arrange video calls between (Client X) and his child, but it is proving a bit problematic. (8/04/2020)

I called (client X), advised him to contact SW worker and seek his support to speak to his child. 14/07/2020

A call to (Client X) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020, he said he heard nothing from the contact centre and no contact was made, so I reminded him to try to connect SW.

We explored his general wellbeing, he sounded all OK, I asked about his financial situation , he was worried financially as he lost his income as a self-employed person and has no access to public fund, we explored his options and advised him to speak to his accountant, also sent him some useful links for Government financial support.

Support continues

In addition, we have recorded interviews with members of staff who are managing working from home, educating and caring for children etc and have discussed how this is affecting them and their work and families.

### **Advocacy**

Whilst the APPG on Fatherhood we at Future Men are the secretariat for has been postponed we are still in communication with academics and researchers working on research in this area to try and highlight the situations our cohort face, including this inquiry and other pieces research linked to Universities around the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

### **April 2020**