



# EMPOWERING YOUNG MEN IN COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Co-Production and Public  
Involvement Report

**Prepared by:** Andrea Waling

**Contributors:**

Sam Richardson  
Mark Limmer  
Natalie Oakley  
Brendan Bunting  
Deirdre Duffy  
Felix McNulty  
Charlie  
Jack  
Kieron  
Lewis  
Maaiz  
Riaaydh  
Tom

This small project was led by Lancaster University's Division of Health Research (DoHR) Department (Faculty of Health and Medicine), and Sociology and Social Work, School of Social Sciences (Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences). This was done in partnership with Blackpool Council's public health and children and adolescent services teams, and Blackpool and Lancashire's Sexual Health services team, with support from local charities and businesses.

It was funded by a DoHR staff development grant.

It was also supported by the Health Partnerships Team, the Lancaster University Sports Centre, and the Lancaster Human Performance Lab.

## Local Support

**The Kings Trust:** helps people aged 11 to 30 to build confidence, get a job or launch a business.

[kingstrust.org.uk](http://kingstrust.org.uk)

**Boathouse Youth:** Blackpool's leading youth charity, providing fully-funded opportunities for children, young people and families.

[thebhy.co.uk](http://thebhy.co.uk)

## Local Business

**Blackpool Tower:** an iconic institution and provided in-kind support to this project.

[theblackpooltower.com](http://theblackpooltower.com)

**Blackpool Football Club:** is a professional association football club based in the seaside resort of Blackpool, Lancashire, England, and provided in-kind support to this project.

[blackpoolfc.co.uk](http://blackpoolfc.co.uk)

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# Overview

**Young men in contact with social care are often overlooked in research and policy about relationships and sexual health. Including young men's perspectives helps make research, services, and support more relevant and effective.**

To address this gap, planned public involvement and engagement activities aimed to co-produce a research agenda informed by lived experience and practitioner insight.

This was to support a research agenda around young men, relationships and sexual health by building trust, encouraging open dialogue, exploring barriers, and shaping relevant, impactful research. research.



# Background

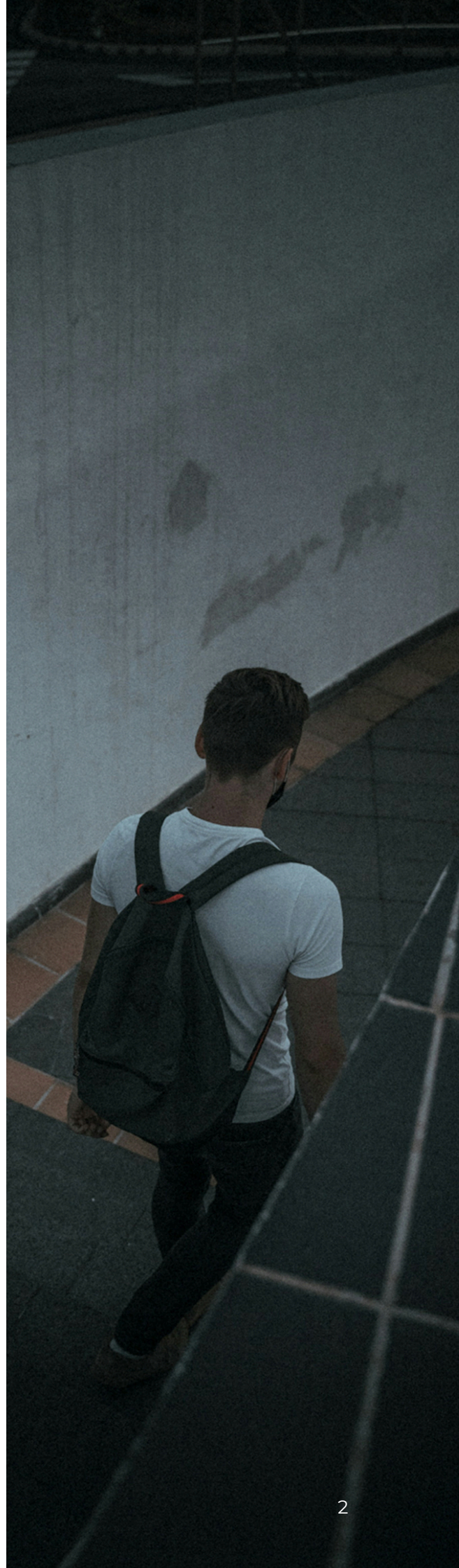
Young men who face social marginalisation, such as those living in low-income coastal communities or in contact with social care or youth justice, may have limited access to social care services, and support. [1-3]

These challenges can include higher rates of mental and physical health difficulties, poverty, and unstable housing or employment. [4-6]. Together, these factors can influence young men's intimate and platonic relationships and experiences.

On top of these challenges, there is a complex cultural context. While there is more focus on gender equality, young men themselves are often not meaningfully involved.

Programs focused on masculinity are sometimes criticised for treating young men as problems to be fixed, rather than as partners in positive change. [7-10] These programs are important for addressing gender inequality and preventing violence.

However, without approaches that actively include young men, they are often left out of discussions about their own health, relationships, and futures, which can make them disengage further.







# Co-Production

In this piece of work, we are aiming for co-produced research right from the onset, including the development of the research question with young men who are impacted by the above.

Glass floor at Blackpool Tower

**Co-production**, defined as the collaborative process through which researchers, community members, and organisations work together to co-create research and services, has become a cornerstone of contemporary health and social care research. [11] This approach ensures that those most affected by a given issue have a direct voice in shaping the questions asked, the methods used, and the solutions proposed. Co-production also recognises the vital role of community-based organisations in reaching, engaging, and supporting specific population groups, particularly those who are often marginalised or underserved by mainstream services.

This also includes the use of a **trauma-informed approach** which recognise the widespread impact of trauma and responds in ways that prioritise emotional and physical safety, trust, and empowerment. [12] It involves understanding how trauma can affect behaviour, relationships, and engagement, particularly for care-experienced young people. This approach emphasises creating safe and supportive environments, fostering choice and collaboration, and avoiding practices that could re-trigger distress.

Alongside this, we engaged a **strengths-based approach** which recognise a person's capabilities, resilience, and aspirations, and ensuring that policies, practices, and supports not only mitigate harm but also actively promote wellbeing, opportunity, and positive development. [13]

# Purpose

**To co-produce a meaningful research agenda around young men with care experience, grounded in lived experience and practitioner insight.**

## Key Aims

- Build trust and working relationships between academics, practitioners, and young men.
- Create spaces for honest, informal dialogue around sexual health, being care experienced, platonic and intimate relationships, and masculinity.
- Understand challenges, barriers, and lived experiences.
- Inform the framing of future research questions, methodology, and outputs.
- Provide an opportunity for young men and practitioners to be involved in research from the onset.

## Desired Outcomes

- Trust and connection among participants.
- Clearer understanding of knowledge gaps, needs, and lived dynamics.
- Early insight to guide research direction.
- Co-produced research design for the future bid.
- Foundation for long-term collaborative research relationships.
- Capacity building around research for young men and practitioners involved.





Lancaster University  
Human Performance Lab



Lancaster University  
Table Tennis



Karaoke

# People Involved

**This piece of work involved a range of important people including young men as public contributors, researchers from Lancaster University, Blackpool Council, and the Blackpool and Lancashire Sexual Health Services.**

## Public Contributors

The project engaged young men as public contributors aged 17–25, including care leavers, those not in employment, education or training (NEET), individuals involved with youth services, and others experiencing various forms of disenfranchisement or expressing interest in supporting the project. These eight young men were engaged through networks including the Kings Trust and Boathouse Youth.

Their experiences and input were central to the work, and the activities were designed to include and support them. Some of these young men were already involved as youth advisors, but their lived experiences remained important and relevant.

Notably, many peer workers had themselves begun as young people in need of support within the social care system.

Riyaadh Maaize Tom Lewis  
Charlie Kieron Jack Tom

# Team

## Academics, Partners & Support

**Dr Andrea Waling**

Division of Health Research & Social Work

**Professor Mark Limmer**

Division of Health Research

**Dr Felix McNulty**

Division of Health Research

**Dr Deirdre Duffy**

Sociology

**Sam Richardson**

Public Health, Blackpool Council

**Natalie Oakley**

Blackpool & Lancashire Sexual Health Services

**Brendan Bunting**

Children and Adolescent Services, Blackpool Council

**Stuart Powers**

Innovation Community Manager,  
Health Partnerships Team

**Jack Cunnington**

Lab Manager, Human Performance Lab,  
Lancaster Medical School

**Ash Osborne**

Lab Technician, Human Performance Lab,  
Lancaster Medical School

The **Lancaster University** academic team aimed to design a social care research project that supported young men's relationship wellbeing by building genuine connections and understanding their challenges

**Blackpool Council's** public health and children and adolescent services teams, and **Blackpool and Lancashire Sexual Health Services** were the primary organisational partners, providing expertise in supporting coastal communities and young people. They facilitated connections with young men in social care and ensured public engagement activities met community needs.

**Lancaster University's Health Partnerships Team** organised a visit day with educational sessions and fun activities, giving the young men hands-on experience with health and music related topics.



# Development

**In conversation with Blackpool Council, we organised six weeks across the summer holidays to undertake activities to build trust among the young men to take part in the co-design of the research.**

The sessions were designed to make young men feel comfortable and safe discussing topics like relationships, sex, dating, and intimacy. Each week included a mix of fun activities, icebreakers, and exercises to encourage thinking and discussion about these issues. Sessions took place between July and August 2025, with additional research development sessions in October. Funding for organising the activities was provided through Blackpool Council.

A few key considerations were taken into account, including:



Food and beverages



Venue hire of non-council spaces where needed



Transport fare and PPIE payment for the young men



Cost of items and activities

## **In developing the sessions, these key things were central:**

- Led by youth workers experienced in youth advocacy, personal advising for care leavers, and relationships and sexual health education, with their expertise, including safeguarding and risk assessment, supported by the academic team.
- Young men engaged on their terms, feeling empowered and confident in their involvement.
- Opportunities to shape planning, including designing activities.
- Balanced youth-focused activities with sessions linked to the research development aims.



## Capturing Discussions



This report describes how young men helped shape our research. This was public involvement work, not research, so it did not require ethics approval under Health Research Authority (HRA) guidelines, and no research data were collected. Everyone who took part agreed to be involved, photographed, and named.

The sessions were designed to let the young men share ideas and help identify priorities. Short summaries in this report highlight the main discussion points while respecting the informal and voluntary nature of their contributions.

We included simple evaluation activities using Mentimeter to help plan sessions, adjust activities in real time, and inform future public involvement and youth engagement work with Blackpool Council. Week 3 was not evaluated, as it was intended to be a relaxed session.





# Week 1

Week one was designed to be introductory to help the young men get to know each other and the researchers involved in the project.

## Marshmallow Towers

### Activities included:

- Similar likes ice-breaker, agree/disagree questions, marshmallow tower team building
- Choosing 2 things to do for weeks 3 and 5 with the budget for team building, designing group rules and agreement

### Insights

- The young men preferred open discussion and helped plan social and competitive activities.
- They completed a group agreement about ensuring the space stays supportive and respectful.
- They shared their thoughts on where they get guidance, how they communicate, and how they express emotions.
- They talked about school RSE and using the internet for information about relationships.
- They also shared their ideas about dating.



# Week 2

Week two was designed to be a casual, low-pressure session as we continued to get to know each other.

Word Association Activity

## Activities included:

- Lunch, fun facts about ourselves, throwing dice and answering questions
- Word association activity

## Insights

- Young men contributed openly during sessions.
- A respectful environment supported discussion of personal topics.
- Word association activities prompted conversation about masculinity, femininity, sexual health, and relationships.
- Participants talked about their experiences with family, peers, and work.
- They discussed consent, intimacy, communication, mutual care, and social context.
- Session timing allowed discussion without overwhelming the group.



# Week 3

Session 3 was designed to just be fun, allowing the young men a break from more serious topic discussion.



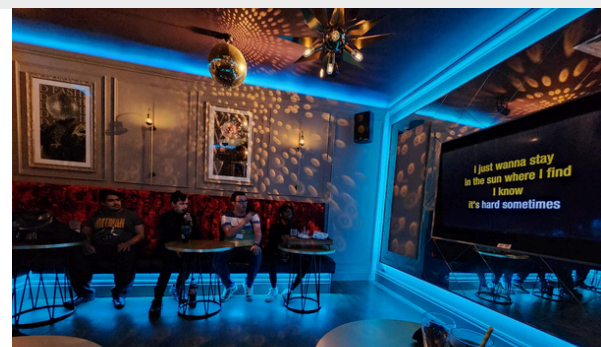
Bowling

## Activities included:

- Bowling, darts, and karaoke

## Insights

- Session provided quieter participants a chance to engage.
- Activities helped everyone get to know each other better.
- For some young men, this was their first time trying the activities.



(Above) Karaoke; (Below): Darts





# Week 4

Working with the Health Partnerships Team, week 4 comprised of a visit to Lancaster University.



Lancaster University Pickleball

## Activities included:

- Visited the sports centre, where the Human Performance Laboratory demonstrated tests for professional athletes
- Played table tennis and pickleball at the courts
- DJ school (learning to DJ) and wall art discussions

## Insights

- Young men discussed young parenthood, co-parenting, mental health, relationships, communication, and body image.
- They shared experiences of stigma from growing up in disadvantaged areas and reflected on local opportunities and life in Blackpool.

## DJ Music School & Wall Art





# THE BLACKPOOL TOWER

## Week 5

Week 5 was designed to be a friendly, competitive 'Race Across Blackpool' to support team building and problem-solving



Blackpool Tower

### Activities included:

- Full day scavenger-hunt style race, including a visit to an escape room
- Local businesses such as Blackpool Tower and Blackpool Football Club pitched in with in-kind support for the day, while others including Clue HQ, Notarianni Ices and the Tourist Office were happy to hold clues

### Insights

- Both teams took part in activities and worked together during tasks.
- Group discussions included topics such as pornography restrictions and digital overexposure.
- Participants talked about future plans, including university, and shared experiences with employment, housing, and finances.
- Prizes included a signed Blackpool Football Club football and trophies on completion of the race.

Signed Ball  
Blackpool Football Club





# Week 6

Week 6 was the research workshop, focusing on developing research questions and helping the young men understand their potential future involvement in the project.

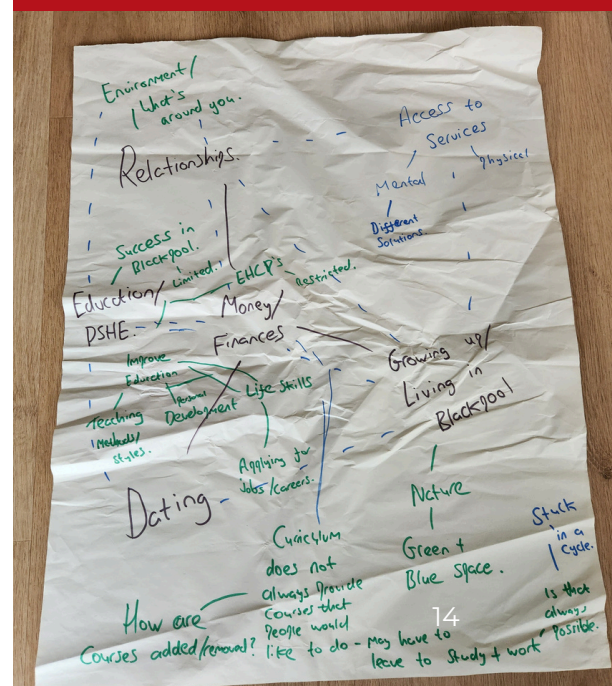
## Activities included:

- Research workshop covered research question (RQ) development and bid writing
- Included recognition certificates, a light quiz, and a reflective affirmation card activity to end the day

## Insights

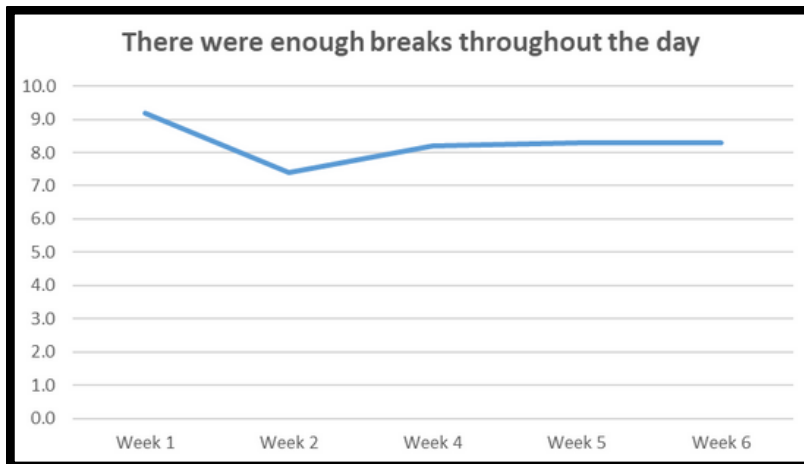
- Participants talked about how confidence and financial security relate to their relationships.
- The research bid timeline and next steps were shared, and future sessions were planned so the young men could help shape their roles.
- The workshop ended with certificates, personalised notes, and affirmation cards to acknowledge contributions and support connection.

## Research Question Development

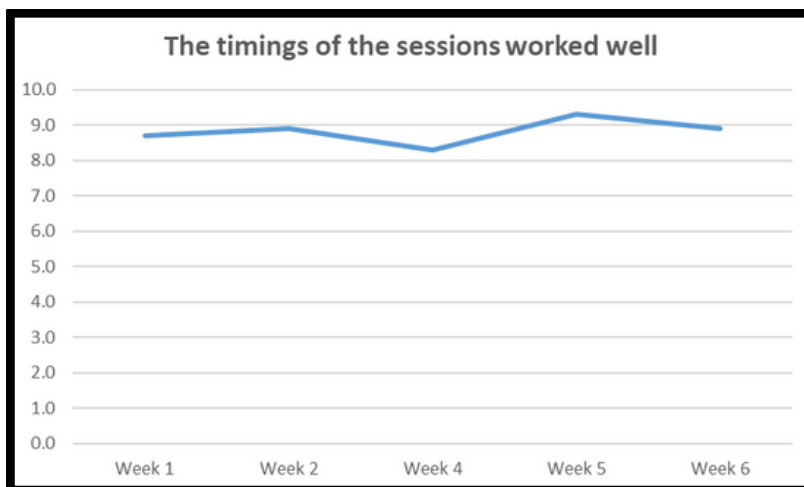


# Evaluation

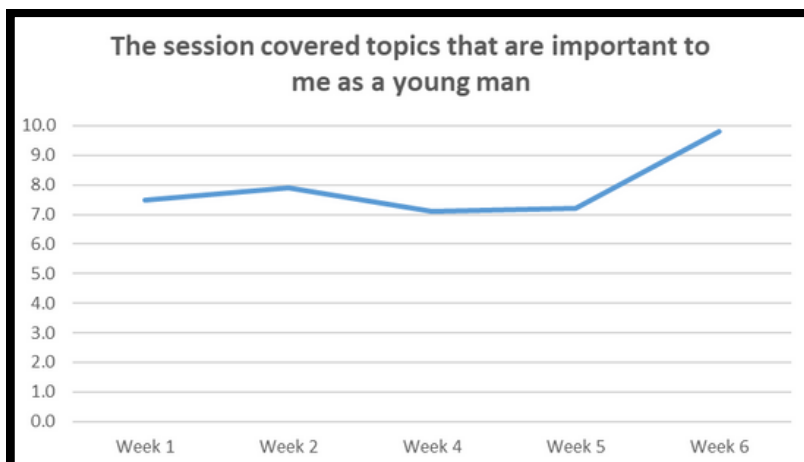
## MENTIMETRE WEEKS 1, 2, 4-6



Overall  
8.9/10



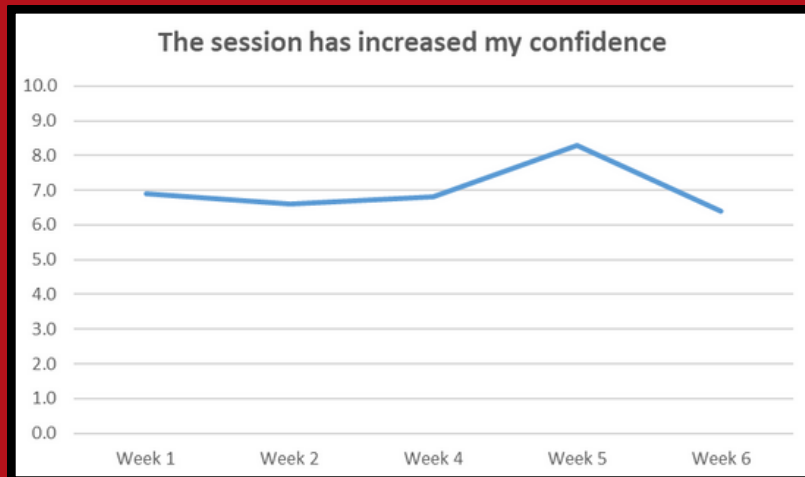
Overall  
8.3/10



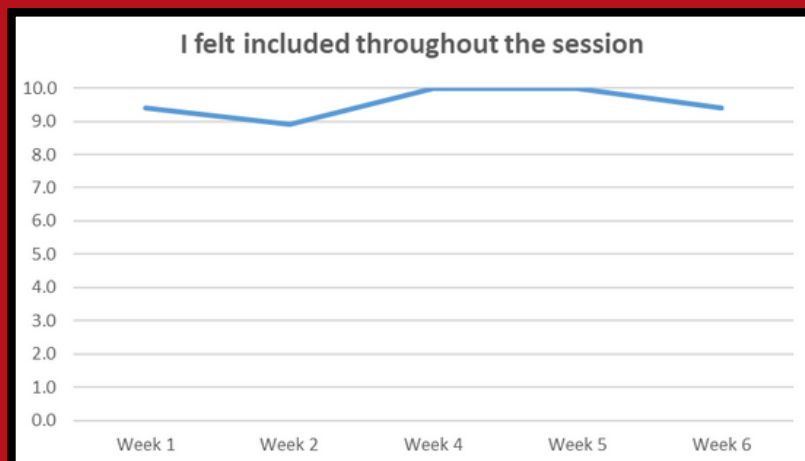
Overall  
9.4/10

# Evaluation

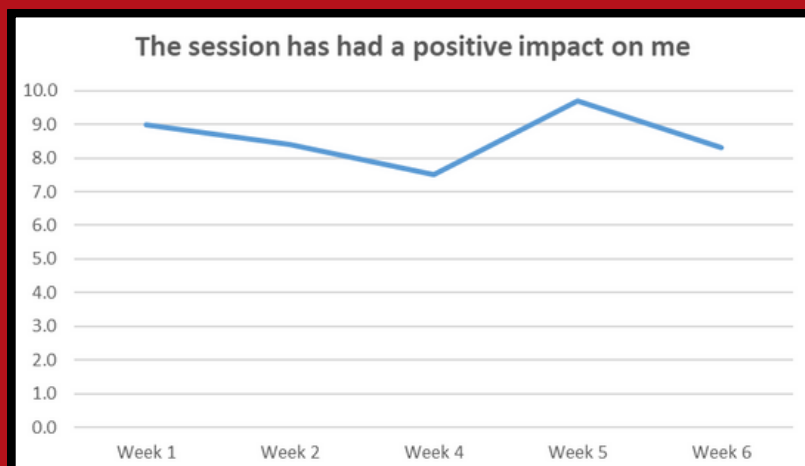
## MENTIMETRE WEEKS 1, 2, 4-6



Overall  
6.8/10



Overall  
8.6/10

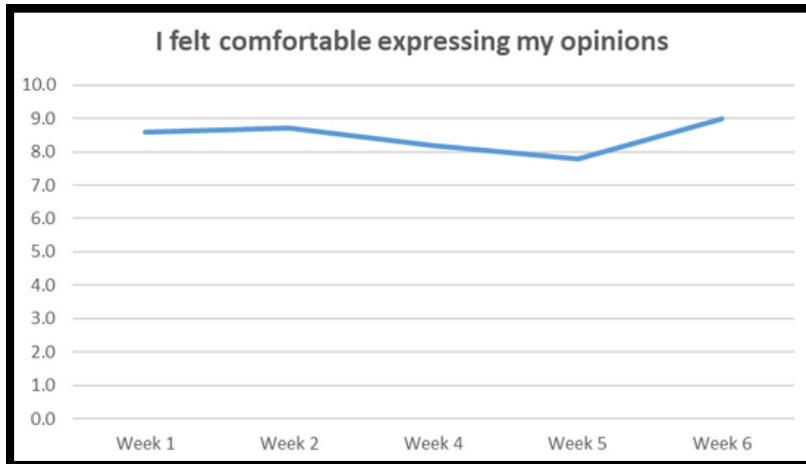


Overall  
8.4/10

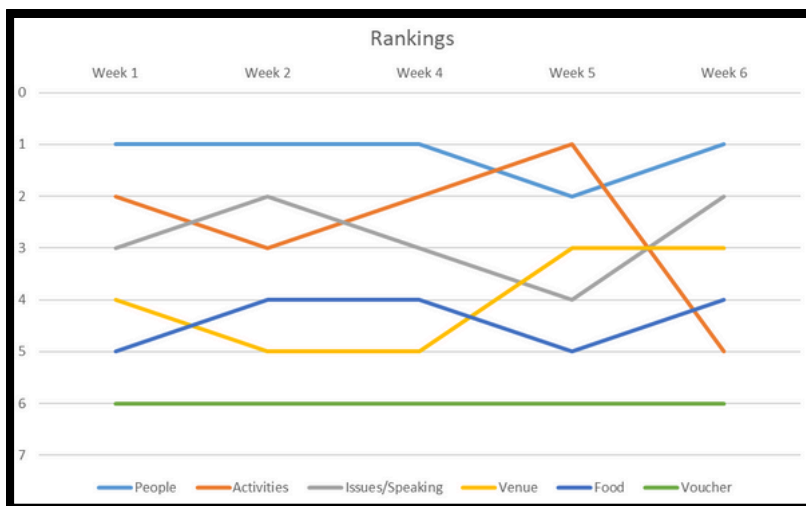


# Evaluation

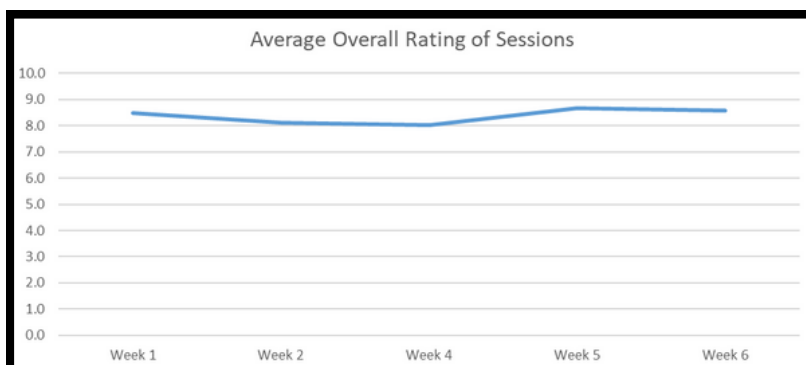
## MENTIMETRE WEEKS 1, 2, 4-6



Overall  
8.6/10



1 = top  
6 = Bottom



Overall  
8.5/10

# Evaluation

**MENTIMETRE WEEKS 1, 2, 4-6**  
**I would improve the session by..**

"Help to have a board or large paper explaining the session for those who struggle to listen"

**"Stellar, couldn't realistically think of any improvements"**

"More agree, disagree. More questions about being young men in Blackpool. What we feel about being young men and dating/ socialising in Blackpool"

"It's been a great sess I think Sam did a great job with the sessions throughout weeks"

"Enjoyed it, I wouldn't improve anything really, maybe more focus on some of the topics that we can chat about?"

"Unsure would like to keep sessions going though, they are fun, informative and helpful"

"Working together instead of different teams"

"If I'm being honest not much needs changing, it was fun and interesting and was great getting to know each other"

"Nothing, everything was fun"

"More scale questions, really enjoyed the questions"

# Next Steps

The purpose of these initial six weeks was to build trust and establish meaningful relationships with the young men, creating a safe and empowering environment for their ongoing public involvement in the research process.

Looking ahead, the focus will shift toward the development of a research bid, with the young men continuing to play a central role. Their contributions will supporting the refinement of the research question, and shaping their own roles within the project should funding be secured.

These next steps will take place through a series of additional co-production sessions, where participation will remain voluntary, flexible, and centred on mutual respect and collaboration.

In these sessions, young men will continue to contribute to the shaping of the research design, and their desired roles in the project.





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