



**MEND** THE GAP

Information & Guidance



**Collaborative working to reduce suicides and support vulnerable people**

Mend the Gap is a collaboration between the NHS, local authorities, charity groups, support groups and any other public or private organisation who are invested in suicide prevention, self-harm reduction and the improvement of mental health support structures for individuals in their communities.

The aim of the scheme is to bring together different organisations and services to forge connections, raise awareness, share knowledge and improve mental health support available locally. The events should identify and 'mend the gap' between the current support systems in order to improve outcomes for individuals who need help.

### **What are the benefits of becoming involved in the Mend The Gap scheme?**

Mend The Gap hopes that collaboration between different organisations, groups individuals will lead to:

- **Increased access to a variety of signposting and support materials** for vulnerable people,
- Newly created **opportunities for data sharing**,
- A **network of local contacts** who can advise one another of any developing local issues,
- A more **united approach to mental health** support in the local area, allowing one service to suggest another alternative and/or relevant support services for individuals,
- A **holistic knowledge base** which will allow services to refer individuals to other local services for relevant support.

### **How do I start my own Mend The Gap network?**

**To hold a Mend The Gap event, you will need:**

#### **Space**

A place to hold the event. Office space, a village hall, football clubs – whatever is available. The space should have access to a screen so that attendees can share presentations.

#### **Tables**

There should preferably some table space so that any signposting collateral can be displayed and taken home by attendees.



**The amount of great services that are available in the local area and that I wasn't aware of is staggering**



## Catering

You may also want to have facilities to provide food and drink, or you may request that attendees bring their own refreshments.

## Agenda

Prior to the event, you should have also provided attendees with some kind of agenda or running list to give the event informal structure. For example, you may start the day with networking break before the organiser of the event provides an overview of their services and issues. You may then choose to have presentations from people who have research and local data to show to other attendees, interspersed with another break and networking opportunity before moving on to a section where local support groups outline their services and how they can be accessed. As long as you have a group of people who have agreed to take part, you can structure the day in a way that suits what each person is offering.

## Feedback

It is also a good idea to provide feedback forms to each attendee so that they can rate their experience and provide consent for their contact details to be shared onwards to the other attendees. This helps relationships to continue after the event.

## Who to invite

These events are open to anyone and everyone who offers support to vulnerable people in the community. If you are unsure of all the support networks that are in your area, you can visit the Hub of Hope ([www.hubofhope.co.uk](http://www.hubofhope.co.uk)) and search for local organisations.



**An amazing session,  
providing information  
and great contacts for  
signposting patients to**



### **Some ideas for who to add to your invite**

**list are:** NHS mental health staff, GP surgery staff, local police/community support officers, local authority suicide prevention officers, local coroners, support groups (such as Men's Shed or similar groups who may be active in your community), local Network Rail suicide prevention route reps, local mental health charity branches, such as Samaritans, Mind, RETHink etc, bereavement support groups, addiction support networks, local university or student wellbeing services, domestic violence support groups, probation officers, ambulance drivers, Citizen's Advice Bureau employees,

food bank operatives, youth workers, debt charities, pain clinic staff.

*The event should be about encouraging attendance and input from ANYONE and EVERYONE who has contact with or is involved in supporting, treating or managing people's mental health in your local community.*

## Tips for running a Mend The Gap event

Before the event, you should have clarified which of the attendees will be giving a presentation and devised a running order for the event. It is a good idea to ask for attendees to email you their presentations beforehand so that these can all be displayed from one device source. This reduces the risk of technical issues on the day.

It may be that you split the event in two, with official organisations who may be sharing sensitive data giving their presentations to one another behind closed doors and then the second half of the event being open to all attendees.

It is best to factor in break times, so that attendees can talk to one another, share any materials they may want to distribute to others and arrange for further contact with particular individuals who they may want to create working links with.

Attendees could be given feedback forms to give their views. Suggestions to include on the feedback form are how beneficial they felt the event was, what they liked best, how they think the event could be improved, whether they would attend again, details of other organisations they would like invited next time and whether they consent to being added to the contact network.

## Follow up activities

After the event, the presentations can be collated and emailed out to attendees, along with the results from the feedback form and a 'networking list' with the names of attending companies, a brief description of their service and a contact name and details to enable people to stay in touch.

## Other suggestions:

- Setting up a Teams group so that participants can stay in contact, share documents and information or hold meetings to discuss further issues that may arise in their community.
- Encourage attendees to register their service at the Hub of Hope so that vulnerable people will be able to find their support when needed.

## Lessons learned and useful links

It took four Mend The Gap events in one county, with most of the same presenters attending, before useful networking really started to take off. Holding just one event will likely not result in the right connections being made and you should aim for contacts and connections to develop across multiple events.



**The learning through this group has been invaluable. Colleagues feel more confident because they have more contacts in the community who can provide support to service users**







**My head is buzzing, coming away and hearing about what is happening across the county and how we can support people to access this range of services**



Once the attendees really get to grips with the other services that are available in their communities, amazing things can happen.

**As a direct result of Mend The Gap events in one county over the course of ten months:**

- Plastic signs produced by one attendee that promote readily available mental health support charities for a variety of issues have been provided and displayed in local educational establishments and hospitals,
- Research findings commissioned by one attendee are being presented to other suicide prevention organisations who have been introduced via Mend The Gap contacts,
- University wellbeing event organisers are inviting speakers they met at Mend The Gap to attend student wellbeing fairs to promote their organisations and services,
- Posters and information booklets produced by charities have been taken by local support groups for distribution amongst their members,
- More organisations have been able to find out what local suicide prevention information and data they can access through formal channels,
- Mental health workers have been able to refer people in their care to local support networks to provide interim support,
- Local charities have been made aware of the Hub of Hope and how they can sign up so that more local people in need can access their services,
- The scheme has been nominated for an NHS Q Award, gaining recognition for the staff who have developed the initiative.

### Useful Contacts



**Hub of Hope • [hubofhope.co.uk](http://hubofhope.co.uk)**

Mental health app and website enabling users to locate support for specific issues in their community.



**All On Board • [allonboard.org.uk](http://allonboard.org.uk)**

Network Rail led initiative, in partnership with the NHS. Printable signposting and support information available for distributing in communities is available in the 'materials' section.



**Mend The Gap • [railsuicideprevention.co.uk/our-work/mend-the-gap/](http://railsuicideprevention.co.uk/our-work/mend-the-gap/)**

A tab on the rail suicide prevention website with a link to the Mend The Gap webinar and guidance document.