Australian Football League Players’ Association

Address: Level 2, 170 Bridport Street, Albert Park, Melbourne, Victoria 3206
beyondblue with donations from the Movember foundation, commissioned six Stigma Reduction Interventions: Digital Environment projects to answer this key question:

“Can digital interventions, implemented at a local population level, promote change across the knowledge, attitudinal and/or behavioural components of stigma experienced and/or exhibited by men aged 30 to 64 years?”.

The Campaign

The Better Out Than In campaign, was a digital campaign targeting depression in men featuring a diverse mix of present and past AFL players as well as coaches and construction workers. The campaign was purposefully directed towards these three communities, where masculine ideologies prevail. The Better Out Than In campaign aimed to reframe the conversation of men’s depression from one of shame, stigma, and secrecy to one of openness, acceptance and hope by focusing on changing both attitude and behaviour.

Better Out Than In was a joint initiative between AFL Players’ Association, LaTrobe University, AFL Coaches Association and Mates In Construction.
Better Out Than In

Design:

*Better Out Than In* released ten digital stories, delivered in the format of ‘mini-campaigns’, featuring a diverse range of past and present AFL players, coaches and construction workers. The integrated, online digital campaign aimed to reframe the conversation about men’s depression from one of shame, stigma and secrecy to one of openness, acceptance and hope. Additionally, the project was based on the premise that sharing and hearing real-life stories about depression and seeking help for depression is one of the most powerful ways of reducing self and personal stigma.

The digital stories were home to various perspectives, demographics, experience and people and at the core of the video was messaging to change the conversation of depression and anxiety. More than 1000 men from the three communities of interest and a mining comparison group were recruited to evaluate the effectiveness of the depression stigma reduction campaign via an online survey. This contained attitudinal measures of self-stigma, personal stigma, intentions of seeking help and actual self-reports of behaviour pertaining to men offering help to others.

One of the strongest elements of our campaign has been in communications which has driven very significant attention towards our campaign. We are pleased to report that an estimated audience of 1.7 million viewers engaged with project related media communications.

**Video Views:**
- The video engagement was strong, with over 384 hours of story content viewed, with an average of 01min:25sec session duration.
- More than 40,000 Better Out Than In video views (combined Facebook, website, YouTube)
Better Out Than In

Key Learnings/Key Findings

• Men who reported engaging with the campaign thought the promotion of the campaign was subtle but many thought it was appropriate for a topic like mental health. Both men who did and those who did not engage in the campaign thought the campaign could have been promoted more at both the grassroots level (on construction sites etc) and through social media.

• Both groups of men (those who did and those who did not engage with the campaign) thought anti-stigma campaigns like Better Out Than In are required in both the construction and AFL industries where a culture of not complaining and not sharing problems due to wanting to maintain the mucho ideal still prevailed. The thinking amongst men as that there had been some improvement over time but there was still a long way to go.

• Men who reported engaging with the campaign were motivated to interact with the campaign primarily to help others, with some motivated to learn more based on their own personal experience.

• There was a high level of satisfaction with the Better Out Than In campaign amongst men who had accessed it over the campaign period. The men thought that it was ideally pitched to the target audience and thought it was highly appropriate that people in the AFL industry were paired with workers in the construction industry. The men valued all sections of the website but thought the stories were the most valuable as they were highly relatable and spoke to men in their own language.

• Even though scores were relatively high to begin with, there was considerable evidence that the Better Out Than In campaign had a positive impact on the frequency of providing/offering support to others over the course of the campaign period.

• The men reported increasing the frequency with which they approached others when they perceived them as doing it tough because they now felt better equipped to do so. As well, the men reported increasing the frequency with which they shared their problems with others as a result of feeling more confident and comfortable about doing so.
In terms of the perceived impact of the campaign amongst men who had accessed it over the campaign period, men acknowledged that it had just a small effect on the way they viewed depression, primarily reinforcing what they already knew. This was consistent with the modest improvements in attitudes about depression (i.e. SSDS data) reported over time in the surveys.

Consistent with data from the surveys, the most noticeable impact reported by the men was with respect to their behaviour both in terms of approaching others when they were perceived as doing it tough and speaking to others when they themselves were doing it tough.

Some of the men that were interviewed also commented on how the Better Out Than In campaign made them feel that it was OK to be feeling down and gave them the courage and motivation to speak to others.

The men reported how accessing the Better Out Than In campaign had given them a resource they could use to approach others when they perceived that others were doing it tough. Men commented that the website could be used to get the conversation started in a non-confronting way and gave them the skills and confidence to approach others.
Conclusion/Recommendations

There were some positive shifts on stigma measures in the campaign group, particularly for those who engaged with the Better Out Than In website. Specifically, these men had reported reductions in self-stigma related to depression and communicated with others who were doing it tough at higher frequencies than they were prior to the campaign. This pattern was also evident when they themselves were doing it tough.

Several self-reports, and behavioural measures of depression related stigma were developed to examine the effectiveness of the Better Out Than In campaign. More than 1000 men from the three communities of interest and a mining comparison group were recruited to evaluate the effectiveness of the depression stigma reduction campaign via an online survey that contained attitudinal measures of self-stigma, personal stigma, intentions of seeking help and actual self-reports of behaviour pertaining to men offering help to others.

Public support for the campaign was overwhelming, both from within the target audience and the wider community, which has fuelled our desire to continue this work into the future. A key recommendation for future targeted campaigns, which emerged consistently in our learnings, was the importance of relationships and, more specifically, connection and trust. The project was fortunate to have had a group of brave and open project participants who were comfortable sharing their personal stories with a global audience.
We recommend a program like Better Out Than In as an ongoing resource for men in masculine communities. Maintaining simple design and informal language would ensure a stigma reduction campaign could become a powerful resource for men who may be struggling and equip them with the tools you required to help a mate who may be struggling. Additionally, continuing to add stories on the premise that sharing and hearing real-life stories about depression and seeking help for depression is one of the most powerful ways to reducing self and personal stigma in communities of men.

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