

VCSE

health &
wellbeing
alliance ■

Social Prescribing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people

Valuing People Alliance - Health and Wellbeing Alliance

2023

Welcome to our
webinar:

Social Prescribing for People with learning disabilities and autistic people

Today will be facilitated by
Madeline Cooper
Rachel Turner
Rebecca Krzyzosiak



We hope you will leave
with:

- Knowledge about ways to ensure people benefit from social prescribing
- Aware of where to find the report and further information
- Inspired to take action in your own role

- Give us a wave with your camera on
- Use the chat box for questions
- Keep on mute
- Put your hand up to speak
- Feel free to eat your lunch
- Cats, dogs welcome

About the Health and Wellbeing Alliance



- The Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance is a partnership between voluntary sector representatives and the health and care system.
- Supported by the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England and the UK Health Security Agency.
- 18 VCSE members.
- Enables health and care leaders and VCSE organisations to work jointly and share expertise.
- Help health and care decision-makers hear the views of communities which experience health inequalities.
- Members include groups and smaller alliances as well as single organisations.
- The Valuing People Alliance who did this work is made up of:
 - Learning Disability England
 - BILD (British Institute of Learning Disabilities)
 - NDTi (National Development Team for Inclusion)
 - Respond
 - Paradigm
 - VODG
 - Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities



Context

People with a learning disability die 22 years younger than the general population (LeDeR report 2021)

The reasons are varied and inclusion social determinants of health.

People with learning disabilities and autistic people experience huge health inequalities compared to the general population. They are also more often socially isolated.

Often people reach out to their GP for help with concerns that have social causes or can be better supported in their community than through medical interventions.

The GP or other person in primary care can refer a patient to a link worker.

The link worker's role is to learn what is important to the person and what health or wellbeing issues they want to address and connect them with opportunities or groups in their local communities that will make a difference to them.



Questions we set out to explore

We believe social prescribing has the potential to build social capital by connecting people to community groups, improve wellbeing and therefore reduce health inequalities.

It is important to us to know that people with a learning disability and autistic people can benefit from this opportunity.

We wanted to understand:

- whether people with learning disabilities and autistic people have access to social prescribing,*
- What kinds of challenges to people face*
- And what ensures that people have the best experience and outcomes*



What we did



- Started with our lived experience group
 - Did a call for evidence through our networks
 - Looked online
 - Gathered a range of reports
 - Looked at resources
 - Spoke to people who had written reports, guides or done research
- Some knew about social prescribing and some didn't
 - 2 people had had social prescribing
 - We found there wasn't much research or resources- but what we found was very useful



What we did

2 surveys



For Link workers and community services (16 responses)

For people with lived experience and their family supporters (37 responses)



Focus Groups and online conversations

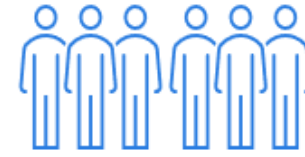
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Who we spoke to directly



3 people with lived experience who had experienced social prescribing



6 people from community groups or places who have social prescribing referrals



3 people who manage or run social prescribing link working services



7 link workers



3 people looking into or doing research about social prescribing



3 people from NHS England involved in social prescribing and personalised care

78 people in total were involved through surveys and conversations



What we heard



Some amazing stuff going on

- Projects linking people at annual health checks to link worker
- Community groups going above and beyond to make reasonable adjustments
- People talking of real change in their lives
- Social prescribing improving experiences of depression through reconnecting people socially
- Link workers adapting their approaches to each individual and being truly person centred and strengths focused

Some challenges faced

- Link workers not having enough time (in contracts) to spend the extra time needed
- Community groups becoming full and not having support or investment
- People being offered things that weren't local enough to get to or couldn't afford
- Services being stretched and link worker picking up things that usually a social worker or mental health nurse might do,



Some quotes from participants

“Talking to my link worker helped me to understand the difficulties I had been having, especially with executive functioning and look for ways to support me with these, rather than continuing my struggle alone. Finally, someone else was doing the hunting for solutions for me rather than me struggling to make myself heard! (an autistic person describing the positive impact after autistic burnout from living in a neurotypical world)

“The shadowing and making introductions is important and helps establish a connection. It is by chance sometimes that you find a right fit – for example, one young woman I linked and accompanied to a mainstream art club and the person running it just happened to be a specialist learning disability teacher, so the young woman fitted in really well through this knowledge from the art club’s lead.

In other successes it is just the club willing to learn how to include people with a learning disability into the club.” (link worker in a focus group)



Some things we explored

- General or specialist link worker role?
- We found that it didn't matter, as long as link workers were able to be flexible in support, and find others to ask if they had a question.
- Specialist or mainstream community groups and activities
- Many people wanted the opportunity to be part of mainstream groups along with others and not pigeon-holed into a learning disability only group. But some people wanted the peer support from being with people with similar support needs.
- Social prescribing is part of a wider system
- Community and services around make a difference to how well it can work, and what things link workers can or need to support people with. A thriving community helps things work better. Rural areas can be trickier if there are fewer local opportunities.



Learning from what works Ideas for people and their supporters



Think about what you really love to do or are interested in



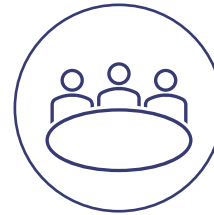
Tell the link worker and community groups as much as you can about what matters to you and any support you need



Ask the link worker to keep things local



Be brave to take new steps and try new things



Try to get support to go to things if needed – this might be from a family member, friend, volunteer or paid supporter



Learning from what works

Ideas for people and their supporters



**Supporters -
keep things
consistent** so the
person can make
friends and
connections in the
place they go.



**Supporters can
help by
motivating the
person** and
helping them feel
brave if they get
cold feet, trying
new things can
be scary



Learning from what works Link-workers and social prescribing services



Work flexibly
within their
boundaries e.g.,
on the time spent
and ways of
connecting with
people



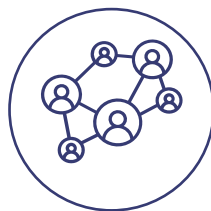
Person centered
approaches to
wellbeing they
are already using
is key to getting
to know and
supporting people
well



**Explore
mainstream as
well as specialist
groups** and
activities or
services for
people



**Strengths-based
approaches** and
**understanding
what matters**
works brilliantly
for people with
learning
disabilities and
autistic people



**Spend time with
community
groups** to check
they can make
the adaptations
needed



**Engage with
people's families
or other
supporters**

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Learning from what works Link-workers and social prescribing services



Explore mainstream as well as specialist groups and activities or services for people



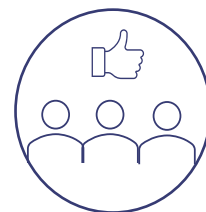
Find training or support if link workers want to learn more about learning disabilities or autism



Draw in support from volunteers or paid support to help the person sustain their involvement if they need that



Consider peer support- link up 2 people interested in the same kind of thing, so they have someone to go with



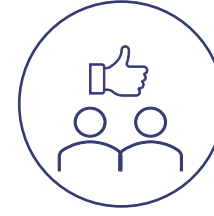
Buddy people up with someone else already in that service or group



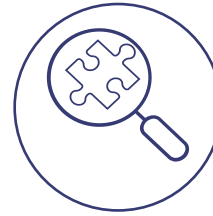
Learning from what works What community groups can do



Be curious and ask as much as you can about the person, what they love and what they need support with



Get a buddy in place to help them be welcome in the group



Let the person visit first when the group isn't there so they can get a feel for the place and space



Apply for local grants if you need to make **reasonable adjustments** or adaptations to the environment or equipment



Link people up with someone else in the group if it's possible for them **to travel together**



Be brave and welcoming and people will become as much part of the group or activities as anyone else



Learning from what works

What commissioners can do



Build flexibility into the contracts for link workers so they can offer more time or appointments if needed for those with additional needs



Make grants or investments available to **community** groups so they can build capacity and put in place **reasonable adjustments** for people to be part of them



Either commission some **link workers with expertise in learning disabilities or autism**, or **fund local advocacy or self-advocacy groups** to support local link workers if they need any specialist input



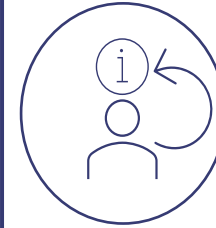
Build flexibility into the contracts for link workers so they can offer more time or appointments if needed



Learning from what works What GPs can do



Use Annual Health Checks as an opportunity to tell people with learning disabilities about social prescribing and connect them to a link worker



Make social prescribing available to people **awaiting an autism assessment** or other diagnosis



Tell families and carers about social prescribing. A link worker may be able to connect them up with peer support or other support, whatever age their child is who has a learning disability or is autistic



Thoughts Experiences Questions



Read more here:

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/building-bridges-social-prescribing-with-people-with-learning-disabilities-and-autistic-people>

And if you have questions or thoughts please contact us at:
equallivesteam@ndti.org.uk

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