



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Social Prescribing

Building Active and Inclusive Citizenship

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What is Social Prescribing?

- Social Prescribing is a **person-centred non-medical, community-based service** that links individuals to services in their community to improve physical, emotional and social health
- Aimed at **empowering and motivating** individuals towards managing their health
- Social Prescribing adopts a ‘broad holistic framework, with an emphasis on person-centredness’: ***“what matters to you?”***
- Social Prescribing addresses **social determinants of health** and community connectedness

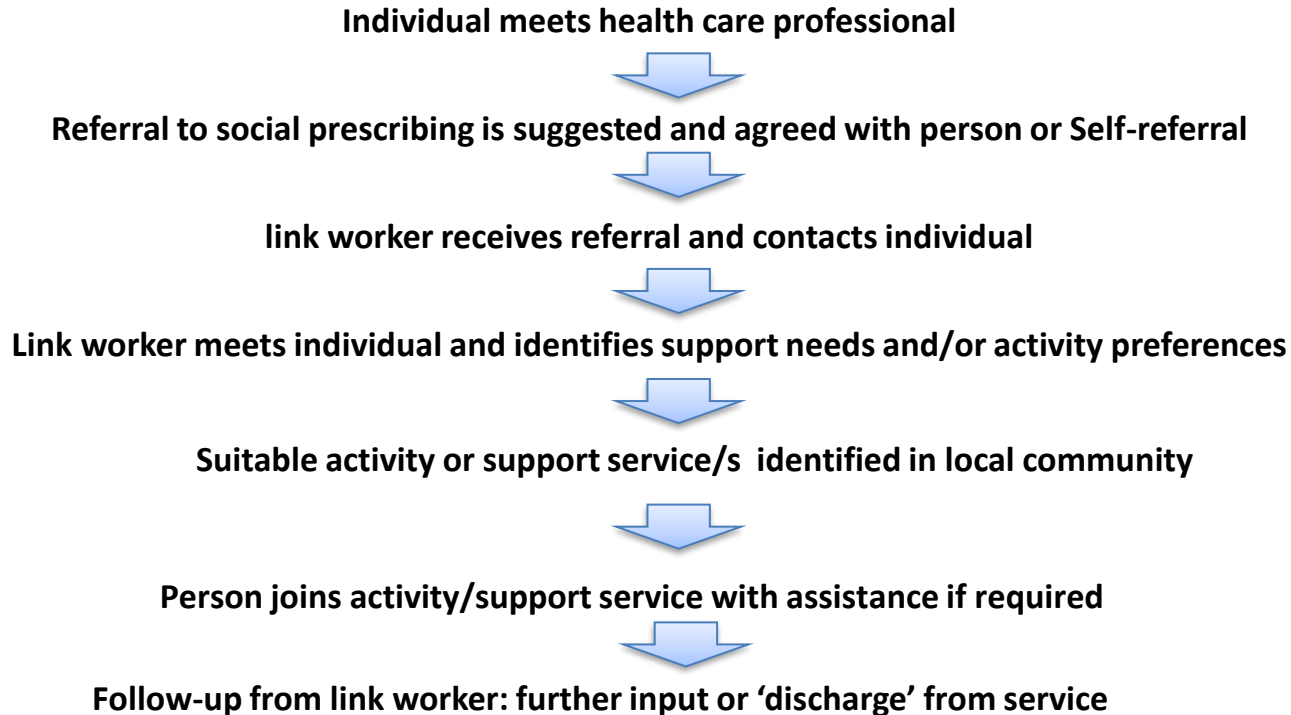
Social prescribing in Ireland

- ~75 services across the island of Ireland
- Located in Community and Voluntary Organisations, GP Practices and Hospitals
- Growth of social prescribing in Ireland driven by health policy to community and integrated care: **“Right care, Right place”**
- All Ireland Social Prescribing Network: Lobbies Government for dedicated funding and professional recognition of social prescribing
 - <https://www.allirelandsocialprescribing.ie/>





Social Prescribing Process



Reasons for referral

- Loneliness, social isolation
- Depression (including post-natal depression) and mental health difficulties
- Addiction
- Bereavement
- Physical inactivity
- Unemployment / return to education / training opportunities
- Long-term health condition (e.g. Arthritis, COPD, Pain Management)
- Family and parenting support



Link Workers: Core 'ingredient'

Varied professional background

Experience in working from a person-centred ethos

Strong interpersonal and communication skills

Empathy but not sympathy

Problem-solving, flexible, persistent, resilient, inclusive

Meeting the link worker

"I was coming here and knew it was for cancer, so I knew I could talk about it without any barriers. I knew I wouldn't put fear into you because you are dealing with it and I could talk about it no problem. Believe it or not I felt a big lump off my shoulders going out after the meeting to be able to talk about it."

"But she has a lovely manner and she met me over there when I went over because I was a bit insecure the first day going over. Because I didn't know what to expect."

"Yeah to be honest like when she phoned I was kind of having a little bit of a meltdown and she made me feel more reassured and she kind of actually gave me a bit of confidence and made me feel better about myself to be honest ... Yeah because you don't realise it but it does go a long way."

"She'd just ask me how was everything going and would I be interested in anything else and she'd email me whatever she found. She was doing all the legwork. Yeah, it was very good."



Activities and Services linked with

- Education and Training (IT support, literacy supports)
- Community-based Mental Health Supports: Counselling; Mindfulness, Relaxation, AWARE
- Community Gardening (e.g. Growing Wellness)
- Physical Activity services: Walking Groups; Sports classes
- Nutrition: Healthy Food Made Easy / Cooking for One
- Financial and Housing, Citizens Advice services, Welfare services and supports)
- Volunteering
- Befriending Services and Specialist Organisations: Active retirement services
- Social activities: Singing, Art and Drama



ASPIRE Social Prescribing Case Study 3

Judy*, who is in her 60s, was referred to ASPIRE social prescribing by a colleague, as her wellbeing was affected by multiple stressors in her life, including physical health, family difficulties, low mood she struggled with for years, and the impact of Covid-19. Reflecting back, she noted: "I think I was in darkness a lot of my life, you know."

Judy engaged with the Social Prescribing Coordinator to discuss her needs and preferences for activities she would like to engage with to improve her physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Initially, she was very reluctant to use online platforms to engage with activities and programmes. However, after a number of trial runs with the Coordinator and learning about Zoom, her confidence and motivation to use online platforms had increased.

She decided to join the online wellbeing group programme over 4 sessions, after completion of which she met with the Coordinator on Zoom individually. She noted: "It was the start of lots of things for me" and recognised the progress she had made: "I have learned how to filter. I can stop and say "Right what's happened here?"... To know what's going on in your head (...). It doesn't take away the stress... But it lessens it and then you're ready to face it."

After her positive experience joining a group online, she discussed other opportunities for group support with the Coordinator. Judy chose to engage with a Living Well programme- a programme for adults with long-term health condition, currently delivered online due to Covid-19.

She summarised her experience of the programme:

"And then I went on a course, which helped a lot, about health and long term health management. (...) when I got on that course it made me realise that what I had were only little things compared to what a lot of the other people had and it made me grateful."

Judy recognised how her social needs were connected with her wellbeing: "This whole thing is about talking to people and getting in there you know..." and how her confidence in social situations had increased: "I'll be able to converse with people without blushing. Opening my mouth and not feel that I'm not relevant."

The Coordinator continues to contact Judy every week for a chat about her wellbeing and social needs. She remains positive about her progress and plans to commence an online WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) programme soon.

Research Evidence for Social Prescribing

- Improved physical and mental health (Aughterson et al., 2024, Percival et al., 2022)
- Improved quality of life and social connectedness (Aughterson et al., 2024, Percival et al., 2022)
- Reduced GP visits and A+E attendance (Lynch et al., 2022, Carnes et al., 2017)
- Social Return on Investment studies demonstrate positive returns for people experiencing mental health difficulties and loneliness (Lynch et al., 2026)
- EU-SPACE: Examining impact of volunteering in community gardens for cancer survivors on health and well-being and community engagement
 - » Five European countries
 - » Training healthcare professionals and community garden staff
 - » Develop referral pathways for cancer survivors to community gardens



