

# £5 million for social prescribing to tackle the impact of COVID-19

- Social prescribing to help tackle loneliness, improve wellbeing and recovery from COVID-19
- £5 million funding to support local community partnerships, encourage innovation and improve evidence base for social prescribing
- Projects include football to support mental health, art for dementia, improving green spaces and singing to improve the effects of COVID-19

The National Academy for Social Prescribing has been awarded £5 million in funding to support people to stay connected and maintain their health and wellbeing following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working with partners, including the Arts Council England, Natural England, Money and Pensions Service, NHS Charities Together, Sport England and NHS England, the academy will support a range of local community activities.

The funding will connect people to initiatives in their local communities to improve their mental health and wellbeing in response to the impact of COVID-19, including improved green spaces, singing and physical activities as well as access to tailored debt advice.

The academy is working with organisations to develop projects including:

- football: Newcastle United Foundation 'Be a Game Changer' programme and '12th Man' programme which work to support men with mental health issues
- Art by Post: created under lockdown, the Southbank Centre sends free creative activity booklets to people across the UK who are living with dementia and other chronic health conditions
- improved green spaces: link workers refer and connect people to their local wildlife and wider activities including food growing, healthy cooking, wildlife gardening, environmental art and crafts, music workshops, and beekeeping
- singing: English National Opera (ENO) have partnered with Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust to devise an integrated 6-week pilot programme of singing, breathing and wellbeing aimed at supporting and enhancing the recovery of COVID-19 survivors
- money advice – the Money and Pensions Service and Mental Health UK have created a Money Support Pack for people who need support with their mental health as a result of COVID-19

Minister for Health Jo Churchill said:

This new funding is hugely important, as it will allow us to build on the merits of social prescribing and encourage innovation in local projects, as well as supporting people to remain connected with their local community, reduce loneliness and improve their wellbeing.

GPs and social prescribing link workers have been working incredibly hard to support their patients through this challenging time. As we begin to support the move out of lockdown, social prescribing will be key to tackling health inequalities and helping people recover and rebuild their lives.

Welcoming the funding, Chief Executive Officer of the National Academy for Social Prescribing, James Sanderson, said:

Now more than ever, the pandemic has shown the value of social prescribing in helping people to stay connected, feel supported and to maintain their wellbeing.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing has an ambitious agenda to support people to live the best life they can by accessing support in their local communities based on what matters to them. We will be working with key partners across national and local government, the NHS, and the voluntary and community sector to build the support structures necessary to enable social prescribing to thrive.

The partnership work with football clubs will help build on initiatives such as the Newcastle United Foundation 'Be a Game Changer' programme, which has already supported over 2,000 men, typically over 40 years old, who traditionally avoid NHS services, may have been impacted by COVID-19 and are most at risk of suicide.

The foundation supports fans to talk about their mental health, get involved in walking football, engage in support groups and learn lifestyle advice through the '12th Man' programme. Social prescribing link workers in GP practices will refer people to these initiatives so that more people can benefit.

Steve Beharall, Newcastle United Foundation, said:

Working with the academy and social prescribing link workers will enable us to reach more people, to help communities recover from COVID. We'll be sharing our 'Game Changer' learning with other football clubs, to support men's mental health.

The academy is also partnering with the Southbank Centre on a new initiative, Art by Post, which was created under lockdown and sends free creative activity booklets to people across the UK who are living with dementia and other chronic health conditions.

The Art by Post project aims to boost wellbeing and reduce feelings of social isolation. Social prescribing link workers have played a key role in identifying the people in their communities who would benefit from taking

part and connecting them with the scheme. The project has so far reached over 1,800 people across the UK, from Aberdeen to Truro, and with people aged 18 to 103 joining in alongside friends, family members and carers.

Alexandra Brierley, Director of Creative Learning at the Southbank Centre, said:

Working with social prescribing link workers through NASP enables us to connect with the people who are most isolated by the current social distancing measures, and it's been a privilege to see the artworks and poems that the participants have shared with us. We can't wait to share these unique creations which will form a special exhibition at the Southbank Centre when we reopen.

The funding will also be used to help people to benefit from green spaces. Working with Natural England, link workers will be able to refer and connect people to their local wildlife and wider activities.

For example, Grozone in Northwich, Cheshire is a 2-acre community garden, wildlife and horticultural therapy project that delivers a wide variety of wellbeing and learning opportunities to people of all ages, abilities and disabilities. The welcoming, supportive and tranquil natural space has benefited over 1,500 people with activities include food growing, healthy cooking, wildlife gardening, environmental art and crafts, music workshops, and beekeeping.

Marian Spain, CEO Natural England, said:

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance for people to have easy access to high-quality green space close to where they live for their mental health and wellbeing. We are seeing more or more evidence of the good that does for us all. We've seen a resurgence in the use of urban parks, beaches and nature reserves by people of all ages and backgrounds who we should welcome and embrace.

So, I'm absolutely delighted that Natural England are working with the National Academy to help people connect with nature and to make sure that everybody can access the outdoors, wherever they live, as part of a truly green recovery.

Other innovative projects include English National Opera (ENO) partnership with Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, who are developing a social prescribing intervention that will provide crucial support to people recovering from COVID-19. Working closely with Imperial College Healthcare, the ENO has devised and developed an integrated 6-week pilot programme of singing, breathing and wellbeing aimed at supporting and enhancing the recovery of COVID-19 survivors.

Imperial College Healthcare already uses singing as part of an improvement in

care aimed specifically at people with COPD and chronic respiratory issues, often related to smoking and asthma. ENO Breathe is being developed as an improvement in care specifically for patients recovering from COVID-19, particularly those who are suffering from breathlessness and the anxiety this can produce. It is the first programme of its kind being developed for these patients.

The academy is already working with the Money and Pensions Service and Mental Health UK to create a Money Support Pack for people who need support with their mental health, as a result of COVID. Social prescribing link workers are sharing this resource with anyone who needs help to manage their money.

Caroline Siarkiewicz, Chief Executive of the Money and Pensions Service, said:

Financial, physical and mental health are all deeply connected. We're looking forward to working with NASP, to ensure that social prescribing link workers can connect people to local money advice and guidance services, to improve financial wellbeing as a core part of COVID support.

Alongside the array of innovative projects, the help provided by social prescribing link workers has been vital, particularly as the pandemic and the lifting of lockdown has had an impact on those who are already vulnerable, affecting their wellbeing and support networks more so than normal. Working remotely or by providing support through social distancing, link workers continue to manage existing social prescribing caseloads as well as supporting those who need it most. They have been:

- conducting welfare telephone and/or video calls
- connecting people to statutory and community support to meet social and emotional needs
- supporting voluntary organisations and community groups to develop virtual support offer and creative solutions for people who lack digital skills or access
- supporting patients to use digital platforms to stay connected

The National Academy for Social Prescribing funds and supports innovative local community partnerships, improving evidence, share good practice and raise the profile of social prescribing link workers (SPLW), who work as part of the NHS, to connect people to community support in their local areas.

Social prescribing is a core part of the NHS approach to delivering targeted Personalised Care and is currently being expanded across England and the National Academy for Social Prescribing is a new independent organisation, launched in October 2019, to promote social prescribing and create a 'social revolution in wellbeing'.

The practice, known as 'social prescribing', has been shown to improve patients' quality of life, health and wellbeing by treating them holistically, recognising that health is affected by a range of social,

economic and environmental factors.

[Updated guidance was issued to GPs](#) that outlines how social prescribing link workers (SPLW) are uniquely placed to work closely with GPs, local authorities, health and care professionals and voluntary sector partners to coordinate support for these people while they are self-isolating.

Link workers are being supported by NHS England through an enhanced virtual online national and regional support offer, with complimentary refreshed guidance to understand their role during COVID-19 and addressing implementation barriers.