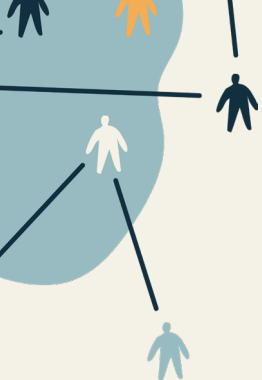


## How to engage in Social Prescribing: Faith Leaders





## What is social prescribing?

Social care services and the NHS are under extreme pressure and experiencing a crisis. For those who get a GP appointment, 1 in 5 patients have a problem that can't be solved by medicine alone and community and relationships need to be part of the solution. Social health needs can include accommodation, finances, work,

education, relationships and creative expression. For example, often people need a listening ear, a place to socialise or support to engage in physical activity.

Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs), who are often based at GP surgeries, meet individually with patients to understand what matters to them for their wellbeing and then refer them to local “non-clinical” activities which will help them. These activities are frequently offered by community organisations, including local charities and faith groups. Such activities range from parent and toddler groups, to running clubs, to coffee mornings, craft groups, chaplaincy services or gardening sessions.

Social prescribing can improve individuals' wellbeing. This may either sit alongside medication or therapy offered by the GP or meet their need sufficiently that they don't need a GP appointment. Linking individuals into local communities also provides them with a support network who can help prevent future issues of loneliness, isolation or similar problems occurring.

## Why should I be involved?

- **Your desire to serve:** As faith groups, we desire to love our neighbours. Partnering with our local GP surgeries through social prescribing can enable us to do this more effectively through reaching those who are in need.
- **You have a lot to bring:** Faith groups already run many activities that can be part of the local social prescribing network. Please see the last page for a list of examples. We also hold positions of trust in local communities and often have buildings, volunteers and experience in building relationships.
- **Your expertise:** 3.8 million people in the UK experience loneliness. Faith communities are one of the few places that people can freely access to build relationships. We offer time and space to people as individuals and connect them into the community. We also offer quieter spaces for people to reflect or talk about hope, meaning and purpose. Conversations on these topics can be helpful for those who might not have other spaces in their lives to be honest and process difficult things or questions about life.
- **Your local relationships:** Whilst 85% of SPLWs said they were aware of groups or activities run or supported by faith groups, when asked “How many individuals have you formally referred to activities run or supported by faith groups in the last 3 months?” nearly 30% stated they did not. Our interviews highlight the potential for stronger collaboration between faith groups and Social Prescribing Link Workers. By fostering meaningful connections, faith groups can play an active role in receiving referrals from social prescribers and enhancing community support.

# What are the next steps?

## Network

- 1. Find out who your local Social Prescribing Link Workers are.** You can do this by finding your local NHS GP surgery [here](#). Many GP surgeries list their Social Prescribing Link Worker on the 'meet the team' page. Others will provide details under a section of the website called something like 'wellbeing'. You should be able to find their name, working hours and phone number on the website. If you can't find this, you can contact the reception service who will be able to give you the details.
- 2. Get to know your local Social Prescribing Link Worker.** Give them a call or drop by and invite them to your activities or have a coffee with them. Due to the volume of emails that link workers receive, often saying hello in person or on the phone can be easier. We suggest that you make a brief 'fact sheet' about your activities which you can give to the SPLW so they have all the key details for reference. Please see a template for your conversation and fact sheet at the end of this guide.
- 3. Keep your Social Prescribing Link Worker in the loop with your activities.** If you have a monthly newsletter, offer to add them to this. When you are running events or different activities, ask if you can give them a simple poster to advertise in the GP surgery.

## Partner

- 1. Invite your Social Prescribing Link Worker to host a drop-in session at your activity.** It might be that you run a [Warm Welcome Space](#), coffee morning or community lunch. You could invite your SPLW to come for an hour and simply be on hand to meet with anyone who comes who might need to access other support in the community such as with accessing medical appointments, debt advice or English classes.
- 2. Meet with other local faith groups to understand what each of you can offer and ensure you don't duplicate work.** You could do this through visiting your local faith buildings or finding your local inter-faith group [here](#). For churches, you could also find the contact for your local Churches Together Networks [here](#) or [Gather unity movements](#).
- 3. Hold a community listening event where you ask your local community about their experiences of health and wellbeing.** Find out what the needs are; these might be directly related to health such as struggling to access appointments, or might be broader issues such as debt problems or struggling to access employment. Share these needs with your local Social Prescribing Link Worker and think about if you might be able to work together to meet these needs.



## Plan

- 1. Find someone in your congregation who can be a social prescribing lead.** This person can focus on getting to know your social prescribing link worker and keeping them in the loop with activities at your place of worship.
- 2. Think about whether your existing activities could become a Warm Welcome Space which would help SPLWs and members of the community to find you more easily using the interactive map.** There is a huge variety in Warm Welcome Spaces from reading groups to lunch clubs, community cafes to games sessions. Have a look at the [Warm Welcome website](#) for further information on what it means to be a Warm Welcome Space and the support that is available for those who register.
- 3. Explore the idea of convening regular forums or discussion groups between faith groups, Social Prescribing Link Workers and other professionals in health and social care to talk about longer-term solutions to the needs in your area.** This could be as simple as inviting other faith leaders and your link worker to a twice annual meeting about what you're hearing from people in your local community about their needs.

## FAQs

### **What happens after I tell a SPLW about the activities at my place of worship?**

The Social Prescribing Link Worker will now be able to mention your activity to patients who might be an appropriate fit. If these patients express interest in coming to your activity, the link worker will pass on the details. In some cases, the SPLW will attend the activity with the patient. However, often the patient will arrive at your activity on their own.

### **What does being connected to a SPLW mean for my place of worship?**

Connecting with your Social Prescribing Link Worker should not require you to change any of your activities. So many places of worship are already running activities that can be easily signposted to- please see the end of this booklet for examples. Initially connecting with your Social Prescribing Link Worker is simply a case of letting them know what you're doing.

You will be referred people who are suited to your activity and therefore you shouldn't need to offer any additional support beyond your existing offer.

As you build the relationship and start to explore partnership and planning together, there may be some opportunities to adapt your activities or offer something different according to local need. However, you will always be part of these conversations and will only be expected to offer what you are able and happy to.

Regarding sharing your faith or conducting religious practices such as praying, you need to be clear on your fact sheet (template at the end of this guide) what your activity involves. If there will be praying or singing, you need to be explicit about that so that the patient can attend the activity fully aware of what will be happening and is comfortable with this. All religious activity should be optional and it is not appropriate to bring spirituality into any activities that are not explicitly communicated as religious. If someone explicitly asks to attend activities that are overtly spiritual, then you can of course continue the religious practices as usual in that setting.

We know that many faith groups offer meals, social spaces and hobby groups for people of all faiths and none and these activities are not religious or the space for spiritual discussions. If a visitor expresses a desire to engage in a religious or spiritual activity you can share details with them of how to access this

### **Am I now responsible for the patients that are referred?**

Once patients have been referred to your activity, they may continue to meet with the Social Prescribing Link Worker. However, it may be that the SPLW has decided that the patient's needs will be met by attending your activity. If you are concerned about someone who has been socially prescribed to your activity, you can ring your GP surgery directly to alert them to the need of the patient or connect directly with your SPLW.

When considering how to refer people to your activity, your Social Prescribing Link Worker is likely to ask about your safeguarding policy. You need to have DBS checks for those who volunteer with you and have an organisational safeguarding policy. The NCVO has comprehensive

resources for safely recruiting and managing volunteers. Your organisation will not be covered by NHS safeguarding policies and so it is important that you have a robust safeguarding policy for your organisation.

### **What if I don't hear back from the SPLW?**

Social Prescribing Link Workers often have a large case load and may not have capacity to follow up on emails. We suggest that you drop a physical copy of your fact sheet with the details of your activities off at the surgery. You could also drop off posters with your activities to be pinned up in the surgery.

### **What if the SPLW changes?**

Social Prescribing Link Workers can change. If you have been able to visit the surgery in person and share posters or fact sheets, the wider GP practice staff should have some familiarity with your place of worship and your activities. This can be helpful when building a relationship with a new link worker.

### **Do I get any control over the referrals they send me?**

Social Prescribing Link Workers work with patients to find the right places for them to meet their wellbeing needs. This means that they should only refer patients to your activities if it is an appropriate fit. However, in your fact sheet, be clear if you can only receive people from a particular religion or gender for your activities so that the link worker has as much information as possible.

### What if I start getting referred people with complex needs?

With your fact sheet, your SPLW should understand who is appropriate to refer to your services. If you are concerned about being referred people with complex needs, you can ring your surgery or link worker and raise your concerns. When you initially meet your Social Prescribing Link Worker to share about your activities, you could also ask them to give you information on local mental health services so that you refer people on or get support for patients if you need it.

### Can people be referred to Sunday church services or mid-week homegroups?

It is up to the discretion of the SPLW to decide what is an appropriate activity to prescribe for their patients. Activities which are open to 'all faiths and none' will usually be easier to refer a larger number of people to. However, some individuals who already have an active faith, want to explore faith anew or have lost touch with a faith community (e.g. a person who has had to move location due to a bereavement or change in care circumstances) might benefit from a referral to a new place of worship if the link worker knows you will be able to offer an intentional and warm welcome. You could flag your regular faith-explicit services with the SPLW on your fact sheet so that the link worker knows the option is there. Make sure you are really clear which of your activities contain explicit faith content and which don't.

## Activities that faith groups can offer to local Social Prescribing Link Workers

advice groups	creative & drama groups	knit & natter groups	arts & crafts courses
counselling	listening services	baby groups	dance classes
lunch clubs	befriending	debt support services	mindful doodling
bereavement groups	dementia groups	mums & tots' groups	cafes & coffee mornings
English-language classes	spiritual support	care home visits	events and outings
sports activities	chaplancy	exercise classes	Warm Spaces
choirs	food banks	washing machine facilities	Christmas gifts
gardening groups	wellbeing groups	clothing banks	groups for refugees
women's and men's groups	cooking classes	homeless outreach	yoga classes

# Local Activities Fact Sheet - Template

To be filled in by a local faith leader and given to a local Social Prescribing Link Worker. SPLWs may want to offer this template to help local faith leaders understand what information would be most useful.

Name of place of worship/organisation.....

Key contact name and phone number.....

## Activities (list as many as appropriate)

1. Name of activity number 1, date, time and location, 1 sentence to describe the activity, who it is for, who it is not for. Explicitly note any religious content:

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Name of activity number 2 etc.

.....  
.....  
.....

## Safeguarding

Name of Safeguarding Lead and contact information. Relevant information on where to find your safeguarding policy, who is DBS checked, any training that your volunteers receive.

.....  
.....  
.....

## Details of other offers

Write anything else you can offer your SPLW such as space for them to run a drop-in, willingness to host other charities that may receive social prescribing, any training that your volunteers receive.

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# Connecting with your Social Prescribing Link Worker - key things to say in your conversation

- Introduce yourself and your place of worship
- Share that you're getting in touch to let them know about your activities so that they can prescribe to them as appropriate and that you're here to support your local community
- Offer to speak through the details of your activities using the fact sheet. If meeting in person, print this out and share it with them, if you are calling them, send it to them via email.
- Be really clear about any religious content and make sure that you communicate about your safeguarding policy.
- Ask if they have any questions
- You might like to ask their thoughts on what kinds of activities are needed in the community and who they might consider referring to your service.
- Ask them for advice on what to do if you have someone come to your activity who clearly needs more help than you can offer.
- Ask if they are happy for you to add them to a newsletter or to share posters about the activities that can be put up in the surgery.

**This how-to guide was produced as part of Theos and the Good Faith Partnership's research project "Creating a Neighbourhood Health Service: The role of churches and faith groups in social prescribing".**

Social prescribing – connecting people to community-based activities to benefit their wellbeing – can be part of the solution to shift healthcare as a model of treatment to a model of prevention. Along with other community groups, faith groups not only contribute significantly to local social prescribing networks, but with their focus on community, relationship and holistic wellbeing, they can play a foundational role in preventative healthcare.

Theos and the Good Faith Partnership call for the contribution of faith groups in social prescribing to be fully recognised, and for proactive collaboration between faith groups, the NHS and wider healthcare networks – at the level of “neighbourhoods”, “places” and “systems” – to be established.

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