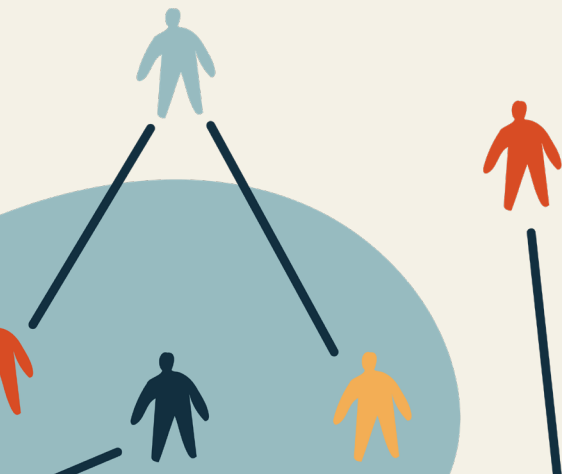


How to engage faith groups in Social Prescribing: Social Prescribing Link Workers



What do faith groups have to do with social prescribing?

Faith groups have extensive experience of offering holistic and welcoming community-based activities. Many are open to everyone in the community and can easily be socially prescribed. They are often offered on a long-term sustainable basis by a mixture of volunteers and paid staff. Alongside the well-known parent and toddler groups and community cafés, activities also include green social prescribing, heritage and physical exercise. Faith groups are also able to offer spiritual support for those of all faiths or none who may appreciate a quiet space or someone to listen to them. Many faith groups play a pivotal role in providing preventative wellbeing support through enabling individuals to access the right help early on within a supportive social network.



How can faith groups collaborate to enhance social prescribing?

- **Neighbourhood level care.** Faith groups are often at the heart of neighbourhoods. Not only do they often have the trust of members of the local community, but places of worship are also located in places that are easy for local people to access. Faith groups can provide access to activities that improve wellbeing at point of need. Partnering with faith groups also offers the opportunity to facilitate drop in clinics etc. that can be accessed easily.
- **Activities you can easily refer to.** Many faith groups offer activities like toddler groups and community cafes which can be accessed by people of any faith and none. Some also offer physical, green or heritage activities.
- **Places of meaning, purpose and hope.** Faith groups offer activities for the community out of a desire to care for people and they seek to build community and relationships. This makes them an important place for those who are feeling disconnected or lonely. Building relationships can be helpful for individuals to explore questions of meaning, purpose and hope and often faith groups are able offer space to listen to those who would like to talk through these things.
- **Essential to tackling health inequalities.** Faith groups often engage groups which are in the CORE20+5 priorities. For example, the [AT Beacon](#) project is resourced by churches and runs wellbeing hubs in local meeting places such as the barber shop. [Cambridge Central Mosque](#) runs a 'Health Hub' where they have run events on mental health as well as cancer screenings.

Next steps

Network

1. **Find your local faith groups.** You can find your local interfaith partnership through the [Interfaith Network](#), your local churches through [Find A Church](#) or look for faith groups listed with [Warm Welcome Spaces](#). Your local foodbank will often also be able to let you know about the local faith groups.
2. **Engage local faith groups through visiting them and their activities.** Most activities at faith groups are resourced by volunteers. It may be difficult to contact them via email or phone number initially. You can often find information about the activities on offer from your local faith groups through looking at their website, social media, or posters near the entrance of their place of worship. Churches may have a 'pioneer minister' or 'community pastor' who are the best people to talk to about community activities.
3. **Seek out existing activities from faith groups which are aimed at individuals who are part of the CORE20+5 groups.**
4. **Encourage your local faith groups to engage in the local VCSE network or other community action forums where they can collaborate with others in the voluntary sector.**

Partner

1. **Explore ways that you can partner with faith groups to deliver neighbourhood level care.** Suggest to places of worship who run Warm Welcome Spaces or community cafes that they could host you for a regular drop-in service so you can meet people who may not attend the surgery. If the place of worship is attended by individuals who would sit under the CORE20PLUS5 inequalities plan, talk with the faith leader about specific ways you could collaborate to promote the wellbeing of these individuals.
2. **Communicate clearly with faith leaders when you refer to their activities.** If possible attend with the patient, if not provide the faith leaders with a heads up so that they know how to best greet and support those who come along. Reassure the faith leader that referred individuals have been carefully assessed and provide guidance on how to handle situations that may exceed their capacity or if they are concerned about the wellbeing of their visitors.
3. **Arrange a conversation with a faith leader, or several faith leaders, to understand more about what they think are the key issues or barriers that people in the community are facing in regard to their wellbeing.** You could share your reflections. Work together to think about how you could partner to address these barriers or deliver a service. Before having the conversation, consider what funding or training support you can offer or find for the faith group to deliver potential services. In East London, link workers meet with faith leaders and the VCSE organisations once a month to talk through the need of the community and opportunities for partnership.



Plan

- 1. Ask your local faith leaders what additional funding or training would help them support their community.** Examples of helpful training might be Mental Health First Aid, additional safeguarding training or active listening. To find helpful courses that you can recommend to the faith leaders, have a look at the [NCVO](#) or your local VCSE network. Recommend funding opportunities to faith leaders, for example through finding your [Local Community Foundation](#). Inform faith leaders about local council funding initiatives, charitable trusts, or partnerships with local businesses that support community wellbeing projects. Offer assistance with grant applications or connect them with organisations that provide training in funding application processes.
- 2. Offer to help your local faith leaders complete any necessary administration relating to social prescribing.** Ask for their feedback on simplifying or improving the process of referrals or partnering.



FAQs

What information should I share with faith groups?

When you visit, clearly explain your role and ask permission for you to refer appropriate people to their services specifying a target audience. Make sure you know who the activity would be aimed at and whether there is any religious content. In our guide for faith leaders, we have suggested that they fill out a fact sheet about their activities. We've attached a copy to this guide so you can take it and invite them to fill it out for you.

Some of my patients have a difficult relationship with faith groups, and I am concerned about referring them to activities run by a faith group. What should I do?

When you initially visit the activity, it would be beneficial for you meet the leaders so you can understand what the activity involves and raise any concerns you have with them, and then make an informed decision. The wellbeing of the individual is the aim and faith leaders will be keen that the right people access the right activity.

Will activities change? How can I be kept up to date?

Activities can vary across the year. Ask to be kept informed of changes such as varying dates/times or new activities. There might be a newsletter you can be added to. If possible, meet with the faith leader on a semi regular basis. Leave your phone number and email address with them so they can be in touch.

Local Activities Fact Sheet - Template

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	chaplaincy	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

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.

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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.

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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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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.

Theos
77 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2EZ

+44 (0) 20 7828 7777
hello@theosthinktank.co.uk
theosthinktank.co.uk

