

**THE
READING
AGENCY**

**READING
WELL**



Social Prescribing Toolkit



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



**Libraries
Connected**

Social Prescribing Toolkit for Public Libraries

What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing helps people to improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by connecting them to community services.¹

“One in five people visiting a GP does so for reasons that aren't fundamentally medical - including loneliness, debt or housing. Up to another one in five people live with a condition or symptoms where medicine is not the sole, or even the best, solution. That's where social prescribing comes in.”²



Image via Public Health England: [Social prescribing: applying All Our Health](#)

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/privacy-notice/how-we-use-your-information/public-and-partners/social-prescribing/>

² [Arts Council England](#)

Using this toolkit

This toolkit has been created to help library staff develop their social prescribing offer. It includes an overview of social prescribing, and guidance on working with partners and Link Workers locally.

CONTENTS



4 An introduction to social prescribing

How can social prescribing help communities?

The National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP)

The role of a Link Worker

Useful resources for social prescribing

Evaluating impact

7 Public libraries and social prescribing

The public library health offer

Library social prescribing infographic

Social prescribing during COVID-19

Further reading

10 An introduction to The Reading Agency's social prescribing programmes

Reading Well

Reading Friends

14 Best practice case studies

17 Making partnerships

An Introduction to social prescribing

How can social prescribing help communities?

Social prescribing enables GPs, health and social care professionals, the voluntary sector, and other partners such as job centres and pharmacies, to refer people to a social prescribing link worker, also sometimes called social prescribing advisor, community coordinator, community health worker or a variety of other connector roles. An important part of the link worker's role is getting to know the priorities for their patient (i.e. "what matters to me"), understanding their needs and then referring them on to local services and resources such as local libraries, walking clubs, gardening, or arts activities.

By providing non-medical support, social prescribing aims to deploy community assets to improve patients' quality of life, health, and wellbeing. The model recognises that health is affected by a range of social, economic, and environmental factors, and helps patients take greater control over their own health.

Evidence shows that this approach works: a UK study found that after 3 to 4 months, 80% of patients referred to a social prescribing scheme needed fewer visits to hospital - as an inpatient admission an outpatient appointment, or to A&E.

The model is being rolled out nationally. [All GPs will be offering social prescribing by 2023.](#)

[Arts Council England](#) has outlined their commitment to social prescribing:

"Though discussion of social prescribing often focuses on the direct referrals made by GPs, link workers and other healthcare professionals, looked at more broadly social prescribing can also help to cultivate the wider infrastructure of arts, cultural and other community activities (e.g. sport, nature) to support health and wellbeing."

The National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP)

The [National Academy of Social Prescribing](#) is an independent charity dedicated to the advancement of social prescribing through promotion, collaboration, and innovation.

They have 5 strategic objectives:

- Promoting social prescribing
- Creating collaboration
- Improving the evidence base
- Sharing best practice
- Increasing funding for the voluntary sector

NASP has outlined 4 zones of activity as a focus for social prescribing:



The [public library health offer](#) has much to offer in terms of social prescribing in all four zones.

NASP have provided the following **tips for successful social prescribing**:

- ✓ Build on what is already there and existing community assets.
- ✓ Get partnership buy-in.
- ✓ Produce local solutions with local care using the [Universalised Personal Care](#) model framework.
- ✓ Be bold.
- ✓ Keep going.

The role of a Link Worker

Link workers facilitate social prescribing. They work with GPs and Primary Care Networks (PCNs - see below) to direct people visiting the GP into local activities.

NHS England defines a link worker's role as including:

Wellbeing advisor, community connector, community navigator, community health worker, community health agent, health advisor, depending on local preference. Whilst the names may be different, the core elements of the role remain the same, hence the generic 'link worker' term.

A **standard model of social prescribing** has been developed in partnership with stakeholders, which shows the key elements that need to be in place for effective social prescribing³;



³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

More information about health systems and social prescribing can be found on the [NHS England website](#).

A [programme of support and development](#) is available to social prescribing link workers and primary care networks.

NASP has identified link worker priorities as being:

- People with long term conditions
- Shielded patients.
- People with low level mental health issues.
- People experiencing loneliness and isolation.
- People with complex needs.
- People experiencing financial pressures.
- Carers.

Useful resources for social prescribing

These online resources can help you plan and develop your social prescribing offer:

- The Local Government Association (LGA) has created a [social prescribing guide for local authorities](#).
- The University of Westminster has created a guide to “[Making Sense of Social Prescribing](#)”
- [What does successful social prescribing look like? Mapping meaningful outcomes](#)
- [Quality Assurance Guide for Social Prescribing](#) from the National Social Prescribing Network
- [Social Prescribing animation](#) by Healthy London

Evaluating impact

You can use the resources below to evaluate the impact of your social prescribing offer:

- [Active Ingredients: The Aesop planning and evaluation model for Arts with a Social Purpose](#)
- [DCMS blog on Evidencing Impact in Norfolk Libraries](#)
- [The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales - WEMWBS](#)

Public Libraries and Social Prescribing

The public library health offer

Health and Wellbeing is one of the Libraries Connected [Universal Library Offers](#). The Universal Offers demonstrate the power of libraries to enrich the lives of individuals and their communities.



How can libraries support social prescribing?

Libraries are important community anchor organisations providing a range of community assets in the form of services, activities and resources that can help to drive the local social prescribing offer. They have the potential to sit at the heart of social prescribing in their communities, offering through their physical and digital space:

- Community connections and social engagement opportunities including group activities and volunteering opportunities.
- Opportunities for engagement with culture and creativity.
- Expert-endorsed health information, advice and service delivery.
- Support with bereavement and end of life services.
- Referral and signposting.

All of the above are underpinned by evidence-based and quality assured national frameworks that demonstrate impact.

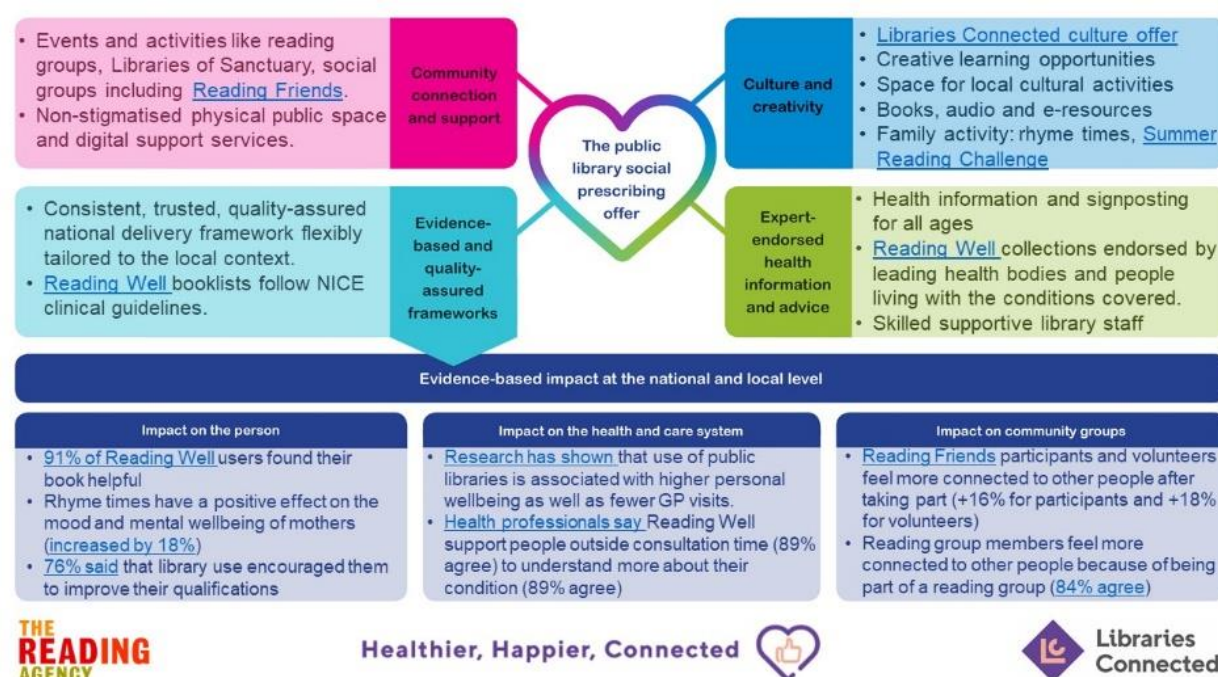
[Social prescribing at the library](#) blog:

Dr Neil Churchill, NHS England's Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities has highlighted some of the ways that public libraries are helping the NHS promote health and wellbeing. In his blog, he outlines:

"...how important libraries can be to our health and wellbeing, especially for people feeling lonely or isolated and living with poor health."

Library social prescribing infographic

You can [download a customisable infographic](#) to demonstrate the social prescribing offer at your library service and its impact on the community.



Social prescribing during COVID-19

Social prescribing has had to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide essential support to the most vulnerable in communities whilst access to physical spaces has been impacted. The NHS Confederation published a blog in 2020 outlining [how social prescribing has adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and the opportunities it offered to "capture the societal response and to raise the profile and role of social prescribing and link workers in communities."

There are more case studies on social prescribing and the response to COVID-19 during lockdown available [via the NHS England website](#), as well as in the case study section of this toolkit.

Libraries are frontline services making a real difference for their communities during the pandemic, keeping them connected and supporting those most in need. There are a number of resources to assist library staff to offer social prescribing when service delivery is impacted by closures:

- The Reading Agency's [digital resources for lockdown hub](#) including a [toolkit for hosting online events](#).
- The Libraries Connected [#LibrariesFromHome](#) website.
- [Libraries in Lockdown report](#) shows how libraries kept communities connected and supported the most vulnerable during lockdown.

Further reading

[The Reading Agency](#) and [Demos](#) report '[A Society of Readers](#)'

Demos carried out research over the summer of 2018 to assess the potential impact of reading on several great challenges of our time: loneliness, mental health problems, dementia and social (im)mobility. If left unchecked, our research shows, these challenges will grow into insurmountable problems. [Read the full report here.](#)

[The Scottish Library and Information Council](#) report '[Health on the Shelf](#)'

In April 2020, the Scottish Library and Information Council published Health on the Shelf – a report examining the health and wellbeing offer available in Scotland's public libraries.

The report highlights best practice throughout the country and makes recommendations for the future. It also includes a comprehensive A-Z list of what is available across Scotland.

Health on the Shelf aims to equip library services to better demonstrate the valuable role they play in helping the public manage their own health. [Read the full report here.](#)

[Arts Council England](#) and [Shared Intelligence's](#) report: '[Library rhyme times and maternal mental health](#)'

This project aimed to test, through a year-long action-research project with Essex Libraries, funded by Arts Council England, whether library-based rhyme times could be a large-scale platform for supporting maternal mental health. In the UK, one in five women, during pregnancy or in the first year after the birth of their child, experience maternal or perinatal mental illness. [Read the full report here.](#)

[Carnegie UK Trust](#), [Wellcome](#) and [The Wolfson Foundation's Engaging Libraries programme](#)

The Engaging Libraries programme that supports public libraries to run public engagement activities on research within the themes of health, society, and culture. It helps to facilitate partnerships between public libraries and researchers, and spark people's curiosity around topics that are relevant or interesting to them. [Read more about Engaging Libraries here.](#)

The Reading Agency's social prescribing programmes



Reading Well

[Reading Well](#) provides helpful reading to support health and wellbeing.

Reading Well books are selected and recommended by leading health bodies and people living with the conditions covered. Download the [Reading Well fact sheet](#) to find out more.

READING WELL



There are **five** Reading Well booklists:

For adults:

[Reading Well for mental health](#)

[Reading Well for dementia](#)

[Reading Well for long term conditions](#)

For children and young people:

[Reading Well for children](#)

[Reading Well for teens](#)

The scheme is delivered by [The Reading Agency](#) working in partnership with [Libraries Connected](#), with funding from [Arts Council England](#), the [Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport](#) (DCMS) and [Welsh Government](#).

DCMS has funded a universal roll out of the reading lists: [Reading Well for mental health](#) and [Reading Well for children](#) to every library service across England to support public mental health and wellbeing.

How it works

Health and social care professionals, link workers, teachers and anyone else offering support can use the scheme to recommend helpful reading. The scheme can also be used on a self-referral basis. The books are available on the open shelves of the local public library for anyone to borrow. Many of the Reading Well titles are available to borrow as e-books and audiobooks.

How can health professionals and link workers get involved?

Download a [get involved guide for the health sector and link workers](#) looking to deliver Reading Well, outlining how the scheme works and how to get involved.

You can read this [blog by Karen Napier, CEO of The Reading Agency](#), on the National Academy for Social Prescribing website outlining how the Reading Well programme is delivering a community-based health offer.

Impact

Over 2.6 million Reading Well books have been borrowed from public libraries with the following impact:

- **91%** of people reported that they found their book helpful.
- **89%** of health professionals surveyed said it helps people understand more about their condition; **89%** said it helped them support people outside of consultation time.
- Visit [our evaluation page](#) for more information on impact and evaluation.

Downloadable resources

Visit the [Reading Well resources bank](#) to download online resources that can help you plan and develop your social prescribing offer, including:

- Downloadable [publicity flyers](#) to support Reading Well collections in libraries.
- [Partners Toolkit](#) to help promote the Read, Talk, Share campaign with information and resources, including visual assets.
- [Reading Well GP digital pack](#) to promote Reading Well in GP surgeries.

Webinars

Watch free webinars on YouTube to find out more about Reading Well and how to deliver the scheme as part of your social prescribing offer:

[Reading Well and bibliotherapy in Wales](#)

A panel of speakers discuss Reading Well and Bibliotherapy in Wales, including consultant clinical psychologist Professor Neil Frude talking about bibliotherapy and what a powerful support it can be for helping deal with tough times, as well as how the Reading Well book collections are expertly curated and selected. Hear from librarians about the work libraries have been doing to support adult mental health using Reading Well and their unique ability to forge connections in the community, before hearing from Community Navigators about the work they are doing on the ground to get Reading Well to those who need it most.

[Children, Wellbeing and Libraries](#),

Education, primary care, and mental health experts discuss the impact of the pandemic on children's wellbeing and how public libraries could support recovery.

Reading Friends

[Reading Friends](#) brings people together to read, share stories, meet new friends and have fun. The programme uses reading – whether books, magazines, newspapers, or anything else – to start everyone chatting. It creates social connections and takes a person-centred approach, building on interests and hobbies to get people talking.

Reading Friends has been developed with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and DCMS. It is delivered [across the UK](#) by local community-based delivery partners and is expanding through around 100 public library authorities in England in early 2021, with the aim to develop across more locations later in 2021.

If you're currently running Reading Friends, your local link worker could provide referrals, identifying those who could benefit from your local project.



Impact

Reading Friends shows how powerful reading and shared stories can be. Our evaluation findings provide evidence that Reading Friends is making a difference to people's lives, improving social connections, quality of life and experience of reading.

- 96% of participants and 97% of volunteers rated their experience as Good or Excellent.
- 83% of participants and 95% of volunteers agreed they felt connected to other people which was an increase while being involved in the programme.
- 76% of participants indicated the programme had added purpose to their week.
- 93% agreed the programme had increased their enjoyment of talking about reading with others.

Case studies

Read a selection of best practice case studies on libraries offering social prescribing initiatives.

Social prescribing and Reading Well in North Wales

Conwy and Denbighshire library authorities in North Wales have a history of incredible collaborative work within their local community to ensure that their services reach as many people as possible, and during the pandemic has been no exception. By teaming up with their local community navigators, they have been able to ensure [Reading Well Books on Prescription for mental health](#) reach those in the community who could most benefit from the collection, supporting people's mental health and wellbeing.

What is the role of a community navigator?

A community navigator (or link worker, wellbeing advisor, community connector, community health worker, community health agent, or health advisor, depending on local preference) works with local health boards and Primary Care Networks to support and refer people to local services such as libraries, walking clubs, gardening or arts activities, with the aim to deploy community assets that improve quality of life, health and wellbeing. This is known as "social prescribing". Your GP or other health professional can refer you to a community navigator to provide non-medical support.

Case Study: Claire's Story

Claire* was first referred to her local community navigator, Janet*, in December 2019 when she was due to be discharged from a psychiatric unit and was really struggling to cope with her anxiety.

Claire was supported by Janet for several months and was well on the way to managing her anxiety and had started to take up the interests she had once enjoyed.

But, as with many of us, when

Covid restrictions came into place in March 2020, Claire's mental health started to decline. Whilst having to shield, Claire tried to put a routine in place that would prevent her from having too much time to overthink things which would end up triggering her anxiety, but this was becoming harder for her to manage alone.

Janet supported Claire on a daily basis with phone calls to reassure her and check she was managing but when it was apparent that she was battling with her anxiety, Janet suggested that Claire could try using [Reading Well for mental health](#) to support her wellbeing and manage her anxiety.

Through the connections that Conwy and Denbighshire Library Authorities had established with the community navigators, Janet was able to borrow several of the Reading Well titles on anxiety for Claire and provide them to her when they met up (maintaining social distancing guidelines). After reading the books, Claire was better able to manage her anxiety, to the extent that she started to once again go out and do some of the things she had enjoyed before. Claire's confidence has



increased so much that (lockdown restrictions permitting) she has since even become a volunteer at a local tourist attraction, talking to people visiting and showing them around.

Claire accredits the vast improvement in her mental health to the support she received from Janet and to having access to the Reading Well books which played a huge part in helping her to manage her anxiety and realise that she wasn't the only person suffering with this condition.

Claire agreed for the community navigators to close her case in September 2020 and, although she still has days when she really struggles, she now has the tools to help her manage her condition and knows that she can access Reading Well books on prescription through her library whenever she struggles in the future.

The books that particularly helped Claire were [An Introduction to Coping with Anxiety](#) by Brenda Hogan and Lee Brosan, and [Overcoming Worry and Generalised Anxiety Disorder](#) by Kevin Meares & Mark Freeston.

Click here to watch our recent webinar [Bibliotherapy and Reading Well in Wales](#) to hear directly from Senior Librarians and Community Navigators working in North Wales.

***Not their real names**

[Social prescribing and Reading Well in Shropshire libraries](#)

Oswestry Library and North Mobile Library in Shropshire have been working in partnership with other community organisations on a social prescribing scheme in the local area since 2018. And, according to Mirka Duxberry, Library Development Manager at Shropshire Libraries, among these resources are the [expert-endorsed Reading Well collections](#):

"The programme offers more than signposting and includes one to one support from a social prescribing advisor, trained in behaviour change. The majority of clients have anxiety, depression and/or pain management issues. We have introduced them to our specialist [Reading Well](#) collection of books on these topics, activities for reducing stress/reducing isolation such as Time to Listen (books aloud for adults), and [Quick Reads](#) book club for people with low confidence and concentration."

For more Reading Well case studies, [visit our impact page](#).



Tickets to the Afterlife



Tickets to the afterlife looks at exploring the concept of libraries as 'death positive' spaces, this is a joint project which allows Redbridge libraries to share knowledge, resources and contacts with colleagues in other parts of England based on their Engaging Libraries project. The library services involved hope to investigate if people's attitudes to death change depending on where they live, on their cultural backgrounds or both.

Supporting people with cancer in Lanarkshire Libraries

Helping to provide a link between acute and community care, [Macmillan in Lanarkshire](#) provides a dynamic partnership between CultureNL, South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture, North Lanarkshire Leisure and Macmillan Cancer Support. The programme covers 2 local authorities and operates 19 cancer support and information services across Lanarkshire libraries. The network includes 4 cancer support hubs where people affected by cancer have:

- access to emotional support
- on-site complementary therapies
- access to benefits advice
- help with transport to and from appointments
- practical support in the home
- someone to talk to in their time of need

As one of the support services librarians said: "I have a health and wellbeing theme as part of my role and am delighted to see the cancer information service emerge and hear how it is already supporting many in our communities who are affected by cancer, and how vital that support is".



Making Partnerships

To access more support for your social prescribing offer, [get in touch with your NASP regional lead](#).

Checklist of organisations for social prescribing

You can use the below list for examples of local organisations your library service could partner with to support and facilitate social prescribing.

You can populate and customise this list for local advocacy.

Category	Examples of local organisations
Cultural sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theatres• Museums• Archives• Galleries• Music venues• Bookshops
Community groups and spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Places of worship• Food banks• Park and playground noticeboards• Town halls• Train stations, bus stops, transport hubs• New parent and baby groups
Voluntary sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local charities• Local Minds• Citizen's Advice Bureau• Curse Bereavement Care hubs• Homelessness groups• Hostels• Night shelters• Macmillan coffee mornings• Carer's groups• Long term conditions groups• Local COVID-19 support groups
Health and social care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GP surgeries• Hospitals• Link workers• IAPT services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS centres • Health visiting teams • Community Children's Nursing Special School Nursing • Paediatric therapists • Occupational health therapists • Pharmacies • Opticians • Care homes • Dentists • Maggie's Centres • Social workers • Youth workers • Housing associations • Domestic violence shelters
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy Trusts • Local schools • Nurseries • School nurses • School libraries • Educational psychologists • Education welfare officers • Universities • Colleges • Further education settings • Children's centres • Playgroups
Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supermarkets • Local businesses • Cafes • Pubs • Garden centres • Shops • Zoos • Sports stadiums