

Lewisham - Working in partnership to meet community need during Covid-19

BACKGROUND

Pre-pandemic, Community Connections was a social prescribing service run in partnership between Age UK Lewisham and Southwark, Lewisham Local and Voluntary Services Lewisham (VSL) and funded by Lewisham Council (LBL). On the 20th of March 2020, LBL asked the service to pause all regular activities to deliver a collaborative service supporting vulnerable members of the community to access food, befriending services and other support. Community Connections brought their knowledge of local services and provided a phone line for people isolated by the pandemic.

THE APPROACH

Community Connections worked rapidly with partners to ensure an effective support system was established. Early on, the focus was on ensuring food supply and supporting those who were anxious due to their perception of their own vulnerability, including those who had not been identified as needing to shield, with the service gradually being able to support with a wider range of needs.

The hallmarks of the approach were:

Playing to organisational strengths

Community Connections provided the access point and signposting role while VSL oversaw volunteers, providing food delivery and befriending support. LBL initially funded food parcels before the government's shielding scheme began, with a transport service flipping the use of its vans to support food delivery. The service also worked with the charity [GoodGym](#) who had their own volunteers who were able to help those who were able to pay with shopping. Lewisham Local had existing connections to food projects which were also utilised.

Advice Lewisham already acted as a single point of access for those needing advice services, with queries being filtered out to advice agencies and this role became particularly important.

TOP TIPS

- Use online platforms to ensure regular communication and shared access to documents and resources. Google Docs enabled sharing of resources and WhatsApp was used to keep in touch.
- Consider how social prescribing can be positioned at the heart of local efforts to bring services and support together and ensure clear referral pathways.
- Build capacity of social prescribing teams to ensure vulnerable people are connected with vital community services at a time of crisis.

Putting clear and efficient systems in place

In addition to clear and distinct roles for each partner, it was also important that systems worked as efficiently as possible so that social prescribing clients could be referred quickly and easily. A fast-track referral to the foodbank was arranged whereby rather than needing to go via Advice Lewisham for triage first, a dual referral could be triggered to avoid delay. This was particularly helpful due to the high volume of queries relating to new benefit applications and benefit delays which meant advice services were under significant pressure.

Utilising capacity effectively

LBL redeployed a number of staff from teams who weren't able to undertake their normal work e.g. libraries, to support with social prescribing call handling. Community Connections provided a basic induction along with a reference document and a support group run via WhatsApp to ensure that staff had the support they needed to pick up what they needed to quickly. This helped to expand the capacity of the service which handled around 12,000 calls between 20th March until the end of August.

THE BENEFITS

By working closely with other organisations, playing to respective strengths, and being creative in the approach, Community Connections was able to rapidly expand capacity. Utilising existing knowledge and skillsets meant that things were set up in a way that worked effectively from the outset.

CASE STUDY CONTACT

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This case study has been produced by the [Bromley by Bow Centre](#) and [Healthy London Partnership](#) who are working together to support the development of social prescribing in London. For more information or to put forward your scheme as a potential case study, please contact hlp.socialprescribing@nhs.net

THE CHALLENGES

While working with organisations and staff who already had experience in different key areas meant that they could hit the ground running, it was important to recognise the support needed by staff taking on new and unfamiliar responsibilities within the social prescribing service. These staff members quickly became useful additional capacity, but it was important to set time aside to compile resources and provide appropriate guidance and support in the early phase of delivery. The ever-changing nature of the pandemic meant information quickly became out of date.

The circumstances of the pandemic have shown what is possible when a range of partners work together to support the community.

- Jasmine Sparrow, Project Manager

CLIENT CASE STUDY – A link worker shares a story of how they have supported clients during the pandemic

“In one call this morning I made a telephone befriending referral, an Advice Lewisham referral, a foodbank parcel request, and texted the client two numbers for telephone counselling. It was a long call and the woman I was speaking to was very distressed. She started off by saying that both her and her daughter who she cares for have disabilities and illnesses. Also, her daughter has mental ill health. I processed her food order and when I asked her how she was going at home (“Are you lonely or bored at all and would you like a call from a telephone befriender?”) she broke into tears and said she is really worried about her daughter and COVID-19.

I set her up with a befriender and also texted her the numbers for Mindline and The Samaritans for both her and her daughter to call if they needed to speak to someone. English was not the caller’s first language and she said she didn’t feel confident calling people. I said “We have understood each other perfectly fine! If you need to, ask people to slow down and speak clearly when they talk to you so you can understand”. Calls like this one take a lot of time and care.”

THE OUTCOME

Since September 2020 the service has become Community Connections Lewisham, offering not only the original one-on-one in depth work with isolated adults, but also a social prescribing telephone line. This has meant the service is more accessible, and can provide varying levels of support as needed, whilst reaching far more Lewisham residents. The service is now incredibly busy and is currently taking around 80 contacts per day.

RESOURCES

Community Connections

For more information on the work of the Community Connections team, visit their website, click [here](#).

Lewisham Local

For more information on Lewisham Local, click [here](#).

Voluntary Services Lewisham

For more information on Voluntary Services Lewisham, click [here](#).

London Case Studies Database

For more case studies and great examples of best practice, click [here](#).

London Social Prescribing Film Series

Watch inspiring films with Social Prescribing colleagues from across London sharing their experiences, ways of working and how they support their communities, click [here](#).

Regional Facilitators – London

Support is available to help you connect with social prescribing networks across London and your local area, for more information please contact: suzi.griffiths@nhs.net and dan.hopewell@bbbc.org.uk



For information and resources to support social prescribing schemes across London, please visit: [Healthy London Partnership](#) and [Bromley by Bow Centre](#).

For information on how to join the London Plus social prescribing network [click here](#).

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