



# Social prescribing ecosystems

**Building value and purpose to improve health and wellbeing through the development of a social prescribing ecosystem**

*Ageing Well Torbay Learning Series*



# Developing an ecosystem for social prescribing

**A social prescribing ecosystem lies at the heart of our Ageing Well Torbay work - bringing together the expertise of Wellbeing Coordinators, employed by Age UK Torbay, and the local knowledge of Community Builders from the Torbay Community Development Trust.**

Working together and with the community, they map out a journey for individuals as they seek to come out of isolation, to socialise and to rediscover their own self-worth. And it works at an individual level, a community level - and it saves money for statutory services.

Independent research by the University of Plymouth has shown a 17% fall in the cost to health and social care for the people we have worked with pre and post the introduction of our ecosystem. This equates to an average saving of £458 per person per year to the statutory secondary care health and social services.<sup>1</sup>

Self-reported visits to GPs have dropped by 32%, and loneliness rates have dropped by 46% across all the measures we use.

Furthermore, 59% of people report improvements in their mental wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

Social prescribing is described by the Kings Fund thus:

**‘Social prescribing, sometimes referred to as community referral, is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services.**

**Recognising that people’s health is determined primarily by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, social prescribing seeks to address people’s needs in an holistic way. It also aims to support individuals to take greater control of their own health.**

1. <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/14749>

2. The statistics in this publication are pre Covid 19 Response.

**Social prescribing schemes can involve a variety of activities which are typically provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Examples include volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports.’**

In Torbay, Wellbeing Coordinators and Community Builders work alongside each other to ensure the best outcome for the individual.

Age UK Torbay Wellbeing Coordinators help older people in Torbay to be active in managing their own wellbeing, health and care - often dealing with complex issues around mental health and social isolation.

At the same time, a team of our Community Builders linking neighbourhoods across Torbay work closely with the Wellbeing Coordinators to discover an individual’s skills and resources, and assets in the community - encouraging people to recognise what they can offer. It isn’t primarily about looking for problems to solve but finding opportunities to develop; not about directing what goes on locally but nurturing development from within.

**17%** fall in the cost to health and social care  
= £458 per person annually

Self-reported visits to GPs dropped by  
**32%**

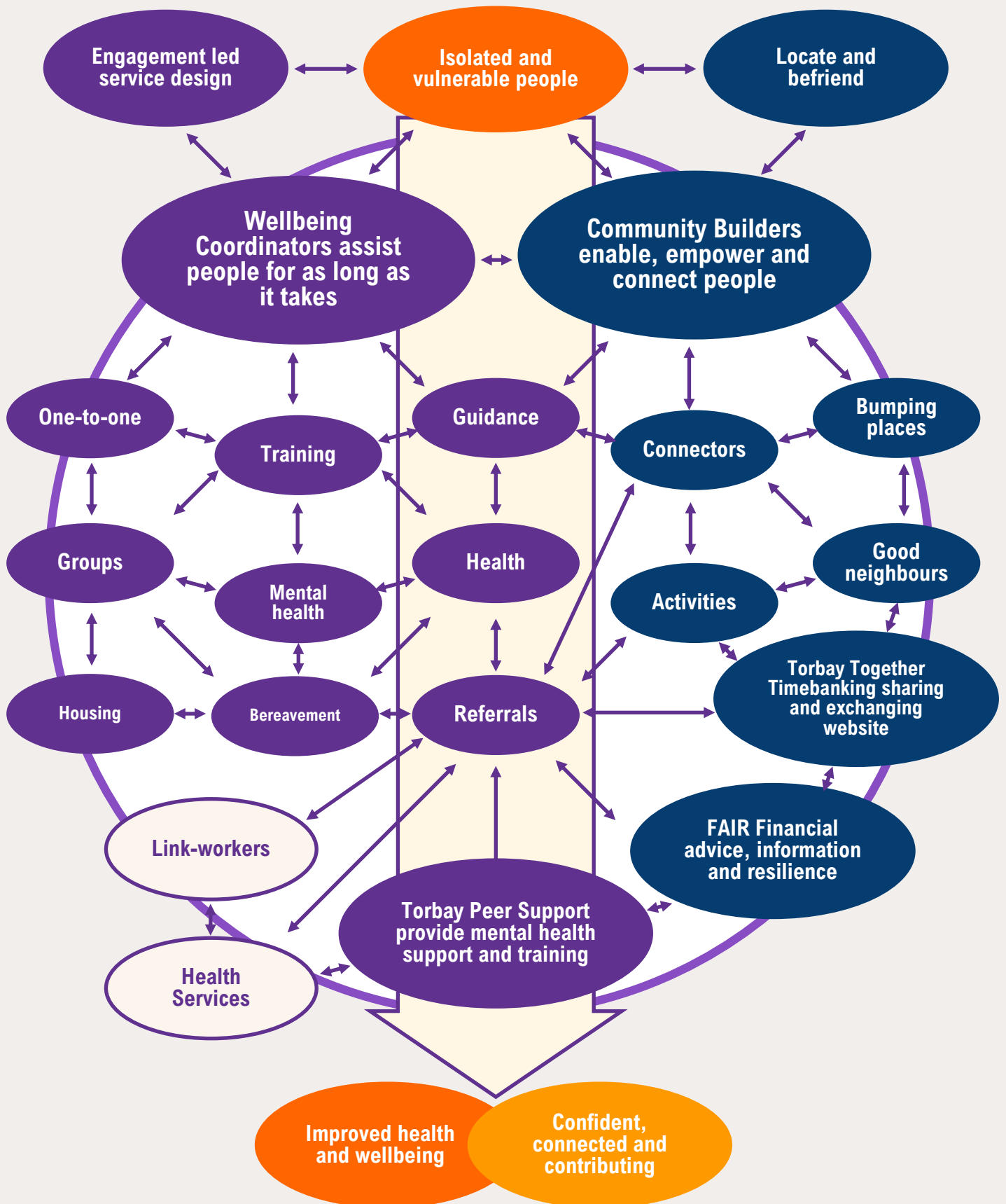
Loneliness rates dropped by  
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# Our ecosystem for social prescribing



This ecosystem continues to evolve and grow.



## Case study A

# Sylvia's story



**Sylvia was struggling being on her own when she called Age UK Torbay, asking for information about lunch clubs and coffee mornings in Paignton. She had challenges with mental health as well as**

**mobility, and after a spell in hospital, she was feeling lonely. Her Wellbeing Coordinator, Gwen Price chatted about loneliness and what she felt she needed to overcome it and Sylvia was clear that she wanted something to look forward to every day of the week, except on Sunday when she attends Church with friends.**

Between Gwen and Community Builder Seema Patel they put together a package of activities, and exercise classes and arranged for a visit from Torbay Peer Support where she now visits twice a week – once for coffee and a chat and the other for the book club.

Until recently the only day she had entirely free (on some days she has more than one activity) was a Saturday, but that will soon be filled too after a chat with another Community Builder, Christine Durrant who knew of a craft shop that organises a pop in coffee and chat. Sylvia will be there.

She also plans to join another community builder organised event - dog walks around Goodrington as soon as she is able with her beloved dog, Toby.

And Gwen remains by her side throughout, there, when needed and always available for a few reassuring words or a little bit of extra help, should the need arise.

Sylvia is clear:

***“Age UK Torbay and the community builders are angels. They have given me my life back.”***



## Hear Tim's story

Wellbeing Coordinators,  
Age UK Torbay, YouTube interview link  
<https://bit.ly/sphelpedme>

## Holistic approaches

*Working with the Ageing well team has brought huge benefits to many of my patients. Often patients need more than good medical care to improve their health and wellbeing. They need a holistic approach which is where the Ageing Well team have really transformed many of my patients lives. By concentrating on their wellbeing and what matters to them it has allowed many patients to live the lives they could previously only dream about.*

Dr Sarah Rowe, Clinical Director Torquay Locality, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust

## Transformative for patients

*“The partnership of Age UK Torbay and Health and Social Care locally has been transformative for many of my patients and has become a valuable service to support them with the parts of their lives we often struggle to help with.”*

Dr Andrew Thornton, GP at Pembroke Medical Group.



Case study B

# Peter's story

**In the space of just a few years, Peter went from being happily married to being violently abused by the wife he had loved.**



A tragic accident fractured her skull and her personality changed, so much so that she ended up in prison after a series of sustained attacks on Peter and subsequent breaches of restraining orders.

This took its toll on the once globe-trotting chef, who worked in top hotels in London, Paris and the USA and his blood pressure went through the roof, eventually putting him in hospital after suffering six seizures.

Depression and anxiety mixed with pain and mobility issues meant he next turned to alcohol to help him through, all of which affected his already fragile mental health.

By the time he was referred to Age UK Torbay by Adult Social Care at the beginning of this year, Peter was at an all-time low, depressed, anxious, temporarily physically disabled, and facing eviction from his flat because of mounting financial problems.

Things have not moved as quickly as everyone hoped because of COVID-19 but a huge combined effort by Wellbeing Coordinators - Mandie Giles, Shaun Calloway, and Rachel Coles, working alongside Community Builder, Marianne Parker, have put plans in place for the future, but more to the point have kept him safe in the present.

He receives regular phone calls from all of them and the odd socially distanced meet up outside his property have also kept his spirits up – they even made sure he had a card and present for his birthday despite it being in the middle of lockdown.

They are working hard to get him online with funding from a digital inclusion scheme via Age UK Torbay in the hope that he will soon be able to email his Dad again – and top of the wish list, video call his daughter on her birthday.

Unfortunately, no new home has yet been found for Peter, but everyone is still looking as the urgency to get him out of the flat he is in becomes ever more pressing as his former wife has once again been released and has moved into a hotel just five minutes away.

There are also plans to get him back into his chefs' whites at a local community café which will hopefully happen in August 2020 after lockdown eases.

For the first time in a long time he can see a light at the end of the tunnel. Although it occasionally dims, it remains bright enough to get him through and he is hoping that one day as well as getting back to work he will once again take up his hobbies of ice sculpting, wood carving and painting.

Ask Peter about the team that have helped him through the last six months and he is unequivocal:

***“You are all brilliant. I can't thank you enough for everything that you are doing for me. I thank you for your compassion, your enthusiasm and your empathy. I feel even stronger about that now.”*** Peter 2020

“Mandie is just so lovely. She's sorting out my housing and hopefully once things get better I'll be able to view a particular property. Shaun, what a bloke. He phones me every week just to make sure I'm OK.”

“The thing about speaking to your team of people is I end I up smiling for a few hours, there's something about isolation. You just all make me really, really smile and feel content and put such a positive vibe into my being.”

“Whenever I talk to any of you, we laugh. You're just a very positive team of people that are doing so much for so many....like a little army helping a whole bunch of people. Just so so grateful. Just brilliant.”

***UPDATE: Since this interview took place, Peter has been found a flat and Wellbeing Coordinators and Community Builders are planning an appeal on social media to furnish it.***



# What we are learning

**Working collaboratively across the community by providing assistance at ground-level, as well as more intensive person-centred work, provides safe and comprehensive support for people with multiple, complex needs.**

- Person-centred approaches working with the whole person are essential to allowing people to develop a renewed sense of purpose.
- One-to-one support helps vulnerable people to take the first tentative steps to re-engage with people.
- We take the time to have in-depth conversations with people focusing on strengths, rather than deficits. This experience is key to changing a person's sense of self-value and self-esteem.
- Being able to spend time to engage with people, building trust and rapport enables us to support people in addressing their social anxiety issues.
- Having an in-depth knowledge of a person's strengths and skills is crucial in signposting them to services and activities in which they are likely to remain engaged.
- When people move from isolation to sharing skills they start to feel valued and purposeful.
- We work to develop a comprehensive knowledge base of individuals', activities and communities' needs and strengths. This is crucial in delivering timely and relevant person-centred support.
- Having access to activities people had not considered before has added value to their lives and given them a sense of purpose through learning new skills.
- Accompanying people to social activities that they would feel too intimidated to attend on their own is essential in helping people build social confidence.
- Having access to grassroots information about the community allows us to identify suitable activities and social hubs within communities where people live. Using social spaces where people might naturally gravitate in the future will help people sustain connections.
- Strengthening people's connections to their community creates a more resilient support network and reduces the risks of falling back into isolation.
- When people develop new skills, they form a new sense of purpose. As confidence grows, they share more. Gradually peer support networks develop and people start to volunteer their time in order to support more people in their communities.
- A responsive referral system that links to peer support networks provides clear and trustworthy avenues for people to find their way.
- We create strong networks from the ground up and engage with people in designing our services, courses, and materials – as a result our work is more tailored to people's needs.
- The strong partnerships and holistic nature of the programme mean people only have to deal with one organisation, despite receiving services from diverse organisations. This increases the likelihood of people remaining engaged in the programme.
- We are able to 'catch' and support people who are not eligible to receive social care and, therefore, are at risk of becoming further isolated.
- It is important to nurture vulnerable people to have a stronger voice and to ensure their 'voices;' are heard.
- We actively educate people about their rights, signpost them to relevant organisations, and encourage them to get involved in their communities.
- People have flourished and become more willing to share their skills through volunteering.
- Our knowledge of local activities and their work in disseminating this information has a positive impact on people's perceptions of their communities and sharing people's skills, experiences and successes through local newsletters and networks improves wider perceptions of ageing.

Summarised from interviews with AWT partners and participants:  
'AWT Top level summary of qualitative work, SERIO, Research and Innovation University of Plymouth, June 2020.'





## Core values and principles

*Louise Cole, Social Worker, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust:*

**Since the beginning of the Ageing Well journey to where we are today, I feel as though we have gone back to the heart of social work, and it's core values and principles: empowerment, strengths based practice, enabling individuals to achieve their own unique outcomes, and bringing communities together.**

The progression of the community led support and Ageing Well programme has resulted in some very positive outcomes within our local community. The professional relationships we have developed between our local authority, community and charitable organisations has been astounding. The wealth of knowledge and expertise held by Ageing Well workers is incredible and they have evidenced their abilities to work with some very challenging and complex individuals within their community's. They offer areas of specialism including dementia, housing and domestic violence which has been an incredible asset to have out there in our community.

The relationships we have developed has resulted in reducing waiting times for social care intervention, improved access to services, greater use of community facilities and signposting, as-well-as collaborative working which has resulted in individuals not having to "tell their story more than once to access the right support for them".

By creating such positive professional relationships this has resulted in cutting down on time consuming and conventional referral methods, and resulted in the Wellbeing Coordinators feeling confident in calling a social worker directly to ask for ad-hoc advice and support.

Additionally the Wellbeing Coordinators have offered professionals such as myself amazing opportunities within our own professional development such as access to training outside of our organisation. By developing such positive relationships I was able to become a domestic violence champion via training sought and found by the Wellbeing Coordinators. Not only is this beneficial within our local authority, but completing training alongside volunteers and community workers, has resulted in me knowing exact people to refer to with the most appropriate

training and skills for the individuals with whom I work with.

The Ageing Well service has been a fundamental asset within our community, and they have continued to dedicate hard work, expertise and offer a more streamlined and approachable services within our community, that has achieved some amazing outcomes.

## Ageing Well Torbay

**Ageing Well Torbay is part of Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better, a programme of the National Lottery Community Fund.**

**Our Ageing Well programme, run by Torbay Community Development Trust, has grown into a collaborative network of delivery partners that together provide a complimentary social prescribing ecosystem, built on strengths/asset based neighbourhood development, connecting people, time and skills, supported by range of VCSE support services that has proven its ability to transform lives, shifting people out of isolation into valued contributors.**

Through the pandemic of 2020 the collective partnership of our social prescribing ecosystem has demonstrated responsiveness and resilience in rapidly changing circumstances. New partners from the VCSE sector have come on-board. Local organisations including Torbay Council and the NHS are seeing the potential of working differently, having seen the power of community and have set up a series of transformation groups to foster a new way of working with the people. This presents a significant opportunity for Ageing Well Torbay to support these partners to become engagement led and strengths based over the coming months and years. There is a great opportunity to harness this goodwill and appetite to really put older people in Torbay in the lead.

Our continuing aims are to adapt our ecosystem approach for the community, harnessing the goodwill of individuals and organisations to really create a place where everyone feels valued, purposeful and connected.



# Do you like what you see?

You can learn more about our kindness asset based approach to engage vulnerable and isolated people. We have a range of learning options, online or in person starting with a chat to find out how best we can meet your needs and that of your community. Start your learning journey by calling Jane on 07548 704876.



## Torbay Community Development Trust

**Developing stronger communities across Torbay**

**Encouraging people to do what they do best**

**Supporting groups to thrive**

**Making connections and stimulating co-operation**

**Bringing people together**

Established following discussions with more than 100 voluntary sector representatives, Torbay Community Development Trust has the intention of making Torbay a place where all people feel included. The Trust builds on existing strengths where key assets are people in their environment.

Call us on **01803 212638** or **07548 704876**

Email us on **[info@torbaycdt.org.uk](mailto:info@torbaycdt.org.uk)**

Check out our training prospectus at

**[www.torbaycdt.org.uk](http://www.torbaycdt.org.uk)**

We have so much to share. Call us for a chat. Come visit and see for yourselves or let us train you and your people in the Torbay Way.

