

# Northumberland VCS | Assembly

## **Social Prescribing and the VCS in Northumberland**

### **What is Social Prescribing?**

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 a holistic way. It also aims to support individuals to take greater control of their own health.

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 the Long Term Plan, NHS England committed to building the infrastructure for social prescribing in primary care and there will be 1,000 new social prescribing link workers in place by 2020/21, with significantly more after that. Funding for the new social prescribing link workers became available to primary care networks (PCNs) from 1 July 2019, when the reformed GP contract began.

Social prescribing Link Workers help to reduce health inequalities by giving people time, focusing on 'what matters to me' and taking a holistic approach to people's health and well-being. They connect people to community groups for practical and emotional support and help the person to develop skills, friendships and resilience.

### **The VCS Assembly and Social Prescribing**

The VCS Assembly has been working with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Social Prescribing Steering Group to educate and inform them of the value of the VCS and the services they can deliver in relation to social prescribing. The Steering Group comprises GP's, Primary Care Networks, Northumbria Health Care Trust and the VCS Assembly.

Arising from the Steering Group, a brief questionnaire was sent out to the VCS via Northumberland CVA e-bulletin to establish if groups and organisations were interested in

hosting a link worker and whether they could provide a social prescribing service to individuals who might be referred by health professionals. The information was collated and shared with the Steering Group. However at the following meeting without further discussion, VCS Assembly representatives were informed that the employment of Link Workers will be carried out internally within the Health Sector.

It is extremely disappointing and a lost opportunity on many levels for meaningful and effective partnership working between the VCS and Health or acknowledgement of the work done by the VCS and expectations raised amongst the wider sector. It is quite understandable that the VCS begins to question the commitment of statutory partners to work with the VCS as equal partners in service planning and delivery.

The CCG have acknowledged that VCS organisations may be receiving referrals towards the latter part of the financial year, following recruitment, induction and training of the new link workers. The VCS representatives on the Social Prescribing Steering Group have raised concerns about the expectations of the Primary Care Networks for monitoring and tracking of inward referrals and the impact on VCS organisations without any further financial resources to support this work. They will be meeting with the CCG to put a business case to them about financial support for those organisations who may be receiving inward referrals. We have seen how easy it is for statutory services to make informal referrals into the sector without more resources to cover the additional demand on VCS services and potential detrimental impact on services and the sector over time.

### **An ask of the VCS**

We hope in the future, if you are not already doing so, that you are vigilant in identifying where your referrals are coming from. Whilst this may be only small changes, it could add up to a big difference across the sector. It would be helpful therefore if you could keep us informed of changes so that we can report back to the CCG and help build a business case for financial support for the VCS in Northumberland.

Email: [assembly@northumberlandcva.org.uk](mailto:assembly@northumberlandcva.org.uk)