

## North Southwark – Building a high performing team in the time of Covid-19

### BACKGROUND

Delivery of social prescribing in North Southwark began in April 2020 delivered by Quay Health Solutions CIC, a federation of 17 GP practices. There are now 11 link workers (a mix of full and part time) in place who all began their roles working remotely through the provision of laptops and mobile phones, using the Elemental case management system to track cases. Although there have been significant challenges to building a high-performing team in which most members have not met, the organisation has shown that it is possible where there is determination to succeed and appropriate measures put in place.

### THE APPROACH

Some key elements of the approach have been:

#### Mapping services and support

The initial focus, as with many schemes during the pandemic, was on food parcels, medication and reducing isolation. The team were able to quickly establish which resources were available to clients through collective research. Live resources have been maintained to ensure that work was not replicated and learning was shared.

#### Communication

Communication has been critical. The team manager has been consistently available to support individuals, and there was an initial five-day training period. Following on from this, daily team meetings have been conducted online. These meetings have been useful in enabling the team to support each other in dealing with cases, share learning and ensure that everyone has enough support.

### TOP TIPS

- **Make good use of technology** to check in regularly, providing opportunities for support, learning and teambuilding.
- **Create shared resources** to enable easy access to key information and save time for team members.
- **Take advantage of every opportunity to engage with referral partners** in ways that work for them e.g. existing meetings, updates in existing systems.

### Training

The team meetings have also been used for training, with local organisations joining sessions to share what they offer in normal times and specific service offers during Covid-19. There have also been informal learning opportunities. As the team are mostly new to social prescribing but have backgrounds in a number of complementary areas such as mental health, physical health and nutrition, having the space to learn from each other has been found to be particularly helpful in relation to referral routes and approaches to different clients.

“  
**This definitely wasn't how we  
imagined we'd be setting up  
our service, but we've managed  
to make things work for both  
the team and our clients**  
- Okema Shields, Link Worker

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### CASE STUDY CONTACT

**Name:** Okema Shields, Social Prescribing Link Worker

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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](mailto:hlp.socialprescribing@nhs.net)

**THE APPROACH (cont.)****Building strong relationships with inward referrers**

The service has quickly formed strong inward referral connections, with referrals coming directly from GP surgeries, the shielding list provided by the council and referrals from Southwark Community Hub. This success in forming relationships quickly is attributed to a number of actions taken:

- A clear and succinct slide deck was circulated to explain what the service provided, how to refer and using images of link workers and this was also presented at key forums such as GP Webinars, the Primary Care Nurses' forum and joint voluntary sector meetings
- A straightforward referral system was put in place using Elemental and EMIS for GP practices and a single shared inbox for other referral partners
- Link workers initially made contact with practice managers to start to form a relationship and have been proactive in attending Multi-Disciplinary Team Meetings to establish themselves within the team
- Fast pick-up on referrals within 24-hours to reassure those referring on support provided using Elemental via EMIS or emailing to secure buy-in

**THE BENEFITS**

Some key benefits of this way of working have been:

- Working remotely has allowed for more regular check-ins with the full team who would ordinarily be spread across a number of locations making logistics for physical meetings more challenging.
- Although link workers are assigned to neighbourhoods, the structure of the team allows for flexibility so that if one team member finds themselves with an excessive caseload, others are likely to be able to support them.

**THE CHALLENGES**

Clearly the biggest challenge has been forming a team where normal ways of working and in person contact have been an impossibility.

**THE OUTCOME**

The service is now well-embedded within primary care and working effectively with other partners in the community. Despite the challenges in building a team remotely, digital communication has been used effectively to ensure strong relationships both within the team and externally.

**RESOURCES****Quay Health Solutions CIC**

For more information on Quay Health Solutions CIC, click [here](#).

**Social Prescribing Link Worker Peer Learning Support:**

Developing social prescribing allies within your PCN, click [here](#).

**London Case Studies Database**

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

**London Social Prescribing Toolkit**

Join the FutureNHS Collaboration platform, 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](mailto:suzi.griffiths@nhs.net) and [dan.hopewell@bbbc.org.uk](mailto: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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