



## **Patient interviews July 2017 – Tower Hamlets Network 6 Social Prescribing Scheme**

The report below represents interviews conducted with nine users of the general social prescribing service at The Bromley by Bow Centre. This service is available by GP and self-referrals to patients over 18 seen at five medical practices.

Interviews were conducted by a development lead who is not directly involved in the delivery of the service. Five interviews were conducted face to face and four were carried out by telephone. The responses of the individual respondents to each question are represented in the same order each time but not all respondents answered all questions.

Respondents in this group are all female, aged between 27 and 85 and represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

### **1. When you went to see your GP or nurse, (on the day they referred) how did you hope he/she might help you?**

'My sister told me about the referral...I made an appointment with my GP. They told me about the (SP) service and gave me some information and options'

'I've been going to my doctor for a while about mental health. I was so anxious, I couldn't go out. I was told about different services, and I picked Furry Friends at Stepney (City Farm)...I didn't imagine something like that could be on prescription...I go once a week now'

'I went because I was unwell but I think the GP wanted to help more'

'I have had a lot of problems, a lot of health problems especially pain, chest swelling and tests for cancer but no cancer found. Problems with housing, working so hard, bringing up four children alone, money worries' (Patient described her housing challenges in detail and a real sense of not being heard or taken seriously)

'I went to see my health care assistant (HCA) for a diabetes check-up and she said because of my BMI, I still needed to lose weight'

'I was experiencing panic attacks, feeling overwhelmed. I knew I wanted to look for work but felt it would be hard with my caring role'

'I was hoping for something, some sort of help. I've tried so many times to get the help I need'

### **2. When your GP or HCP told you they were making a social prescribing referral (assuming they did), did you think it was clear why it was happening?**

'Not really'

'No not really'

'All I knew was that the HCA might send me some information on exercise classes'

'Yes, GP asked what I wanted, did I want to try medication, I didn't and she suggested a SP referral I was told (The Coordinator) would be in touch with me'



'Yes my GP explained that she was going to refer me to a specialist who she hoped would give me more help'

**3. When you left the GP appointment, did you understand what would happen next?**

'My sister explained a bit about the service...but then my GP explained a bit more...I had a clear idea of what would happen...that I'd have an appointment with (The Coordinator). We talked on the phone first and she explained about the appointment. She was very nice and so accommodating to my needs, I get forgetful with my condition, but she was so accommodating'

'I didn't really know what to expect'

'Not really'

'No'

'I was also given the phone number so I decided to make contact myself and I had an appointment within two weeks'

'Yes, I knew I would be contacted'

**4. Do you think the time between the GP appointment and first contact from the service coordinator was acceptable?**

'I only waited a week or so'

'Yes, it wasn't that long'

'I waited months to see a psychologist; it's such a long wait. But with Social Prescribing you've got your foot on the ladder, something's actually happening'

'Yes, contact was made fairly quickly'

'Yes it was very quick'

'Yes'

'Yes'

**5. When you first met the social prescribing coordinator or spoke to them over the phone, did you find it helpful and in what way(s)?**

'I've never actually met (The Coordinator), but she seems ever so nice over the phone and on emails and text'

'I really felt like she cared. I went for the first time with my Dad and she not only focused on me but also talked to my Dad'

'At first we didn't find something that met my needs, I'm interested in arts & crafts...but I've done a feedback form with (The Coordinator) about that'

'I thought it was interesting and I felt (The Coordinator) listened to me'





'It was a chance to talk and (The Coordinator) listened to me' (Interviewer: there was a sense that being properly listened to was a rarity)

'Very helpful, we talked about a lot of things and (The Coordinator) gave me lots of information on exercise classes that could help me'

'It was really helpful to sit down and talk about what I wanted, what I was hoping for and what my goals might be'

'(The Coordinator) was so friendly; she gave me loads of advice and helpful ideas'

'(The Coordinator) was very friendly and very easy to approach; she is a very nice person. I used to speak to my sister every day and I miss her so it was nice to talk'

#### **6. Can you recall how you felt during that first session?**

'I felt relaxed because she ((The Coordinator)) is so easy to talk to, so nice to talk to. I wasn't nervous'

'I spoke to her ((The Coordinator)) on the phone before we met. She was so understanding and caring. It really warmed my heart, it's a pleasant experience'

'I felt understood'

'I was excited about the possibilities for classes that could help me'

'I felt good when I left as I knew there were services that could help me'

'I was glad there seemed to be some other things to help me. As soon as I met her I felt glad, she is so good'

#### **7. Did you feel able to talk more about the issues you needed to discuss?**

'I felt very comfortable and safe...the atmosphere was really good and comfortable'

'Yes, I enjoyed speaking to her ((The Coordinator))'

'Yes, I had plenty of time'

'Yes, (The Coordinator) is so nice and kind, really nice'

'I felt very able to talk about my BMI and the need for more exercise'

'Yes I did'

'Yes definitely'

#### **8. What about the services and support ideas the coordinator suggested for you – did you follow up any of the referrals or recommendations (explore further)?**

'I go to Furry Friends on a Friday. The lady runs it, Jane, is so nice, it's like she's my sister-in-law. They bring out the guinea pigs and rabbits, you give them a health check and hold them, and it's really nice. Jane makes me laugh, and all the other people at the farm say 'Hello' and you get a cup of tea. Some people that go are like me with



mental health problem and others have physical health (difficulties). One of the volunteers gives me a great, big bear hug when I go. It just makes you feel wanted and welcome'

'I went to two services – the first was Time bank. I really enjoyed it a lot at the time. I did jewellery making. This time I was referred to EastXchange, I really enjoyed it too, everyone is so excited, the coordinators were so excited when I told them about my jewellery making. And they were so understanding and supportive about my health – when I need to rest and take breaks. With the other service, the lawyer, I feel more anxious and stressed when it comes to my housing situation. There's no hope. Even the lawyer said it's unlikely that I might get what I'm looking for, and that gives me a lot of stress. It's in standstill at the moment, and that's really stressing me, but overall I feel more at ease because I'm also going to EastXchange'

'I haven't been well so I haven't been able to follow up ideas for getting me out and about but I will do when I feel better'

'Advice workers helped me a bit with immigration forms. I am coming to the Somali group at the Centre'

'I felt a bit let down because although I had lots of information, there was nothing outside working hours and I work'

'I'm still considering mindfulness and it's good to know this is an option. I was referred to Rethink and was given a support worker, I'm attending a first carers' support meeting in July'

'Yes I've tried to but most of those that might help with my shoulder pain cost money and I have problems with finances although (The Coordinator) has helped me with that. You have so many services at the Centre, it's so good what you're doing'

**9. Do you think the support you have received from (service/coordinator) might change the way you deal with future issues/difficulties (explore increased ability to make choices or would they approach things in a different way, equally if they have accessed service if those have impacted their ability to manage and cope)?**

'I was really happy with (The Coordinator), so I wouldn't mind contacting her again. It's really soothing'

'I'd feel comfortable contacting (The Coordinator), even if it's only to ask advice about what I should do next. She makes you feel like nothing's too much trouble'

'Maybe, I know I can call (The Coordinator) again' (Interviewer: there was a sense as she talked that she was asking people for help a bit more in her everyday life to attend meetings, give her support etc.)

'Yes it was helpful to find out more and if the timing had been right I would contact the services and attend the classes'

'I felt overwhelmed with the options and choices I had for services but (The Coordinator) was able to help me see there were no expectations, for instance to use BBBC employment support or Rethink employment support, it was up to me to choose what felt best for me'



'Maybe. I would try harder now to find things to help me'

**10. How do you think the social prescribing service differs from the support you receive from your GP?**

'The GP sits there and talks and prescribes. There's only so much they can do. With this, I have to do something and go out, which I didn't do before'

'There's a huge difference in a positive way. With the doctors it's more medical; they're prescribing you with just medication. With the social prescriber it has that social aspect, it's not just taking a tablet to take your pain away, you're actually interacting with other people to get better... (The Coordinator) opens that door for you. The doctor would tell you to go out, but not where to go. (The Coordinator) knows how to get you to what will be good for you. And the GP does help – they are the first step in getting you to (The Coordinator)'

'With the doctor you don't get much time, but with (The Coordinator) you get much longer...the link with the GP to get the referral (to (The Coordinator)) is good, but the GPs should mention it (SP service) more, I never knew it was there'

'I find my GP very helpful, he never rushes you, that's why he always runs late! He's very understanding with mental health. Then when he said about it (SP service) I never knew something like that existed'

'My doctor knows me very well, I've been with him for a while, so when they said "you should go to Social Prescribing", I was sure it was the right thing for me'

'Not really, they are both really nice and my GP gives me a lot of time. MY GP is like (The Coordinator), friendly and approachable'

'The GP knows nothing that can help me. The doctor doesn't listen'

It was different, longer. (The Coordinator) and I talked for at least 30 minutes and she was so helpful

'Yes, I can talk to my GP but the options for me seemed more limited and I felt overwhelmed with everything I was facing but I could discuss it with (The Coordinator). I can also arrange meetings when I need to rather than having to commit to a follow up at a specific time, say in two weeks as with the GP'

'My GP is excellent but there's only so much she can do. (The Coordinator) was so helpful including helping me complete my PIP form because I'm right handed and my shoulder is so painful and she has given me other ideas'

**11. Do you think that having social prescribing support could potentially reduce the number of visits/appointments to your GP?**

'Yes, I'd say so'

'I think it's a maybe for me, because my pain levels are complicated. So I don't know if I could say I would completely reduce the amount of times (GP appointments), but yes, probably a little bit'



'Not really as I feel I only go because I feel unwell. One minute I feel better and then I feel ill again'

'Maybe. The GP doesn't help me and never has appointments'

'Yes if I could find classes at the right time'

'Yes, now I know how much support is available to me'

'Yes, definitely, 100%'

**12. Overall, what difference (if any) do you feel the social prescribing service has made to you and your life?**

'For me, since I've been going (to Furry Friends) it's about 8 weeks. Jane is so nice and soothing. I've been seeing a psychologist, but this (Furry Friends) has been helping my anxiety too. Before I couldn't do London transport but now I'm getting on the bus. I got a bus here today. And Jane makes you feel so nice – I make the tea and coffee there and it's like she can't thank you enough'

'It (going to Furry Friends) helps you take your mind off your problems. I used to sleep all day - with depression you can sleep all day. But when you're there you're talking to other people, seeing the animals, walking round the farm – it takes your mind off things'

'It's helped with my anxiety, and it's got me back on public transport. I used to get cabs, but I'm taking buses now. And connecting with people - when you don't feel well in yourself you just shut yourself away, I was just sleeping all day. But not now, not anymore'

'I definitely feel with my health and pain levels, going to EastXchange has helped me. My pain levels get to me mentally, but going somewhere else with other people, that's not in my house, has really helped me to relax. Knowing that there's other people I can communicate with helps me'

'It's kept me really active (going to EastXchange). Not just being at home, thinking about my pain levels. But it's made me think "You can do it!" It's just given me that little push'

'Not as much as I would like because of the lack of classes but (The Coordinator) was so helpful'

'I feel more relaxed and I feel I'm making progress. Things are beginning to move forward and it feels like things are possible for me'

'It has been excellent, ten out of ten. I feel more supported'

**13. What would have happened if the support had not been available to you (imagine life without the Social Prescribing service, how would it be different, where would you go)?**

'I'd just have carried on sleeping'

'My friends would make plans to go for coffee and I'd ring and cancel. But I've only done that once with the farm. I'm getting out more, seeing friends, thinking about



doing things on (public) transport. I went to see my son's school play in Romford (note, impression is that son is a teacher rather than attends school). He said "I can tell you're getting better Mum". My older son said "You can't just rely on tablets" and he's right. When I go to Furry Friends no-one judges you, you're all just there to have a good time'

'Depression isn't just for certain people – whether you're a man, woman, young, old – it can get you. It's hard to make that first step, to go to the shop or go a few doors up the road'

'I'd just think "I can't go out, I can't do anything", staying in bed in pain all day'

'I wouldn't have got all that useful information, simple as that'

'I don't know but the GP doesn't help me'

'Nowhere, I didn't know where to go to find this information'

'I would have felt trapped and hopeless. I didn't want to take medication and I wouldn't have known about the services that are now helping me'

'I would go back to my GP and ask again'

#### **14. Do you have any suggestions for things that could be improved/done better?**

'About the awareness. People should be more aware of the (SP) service that they have available to them, through their GP or something'

'I think it's a shame that more people don't know about social prescribing. At the farm most people come from the old people's home and not through the doctor'

'Having a range of different active services (for SP to refer in to) for young people too. Social media is very common for everyone right now. Maybe have some activities that young people can do on social media (advertise them on social media)'

'Coming to the Centre can be difficult for me'

'Out of hours services. I would like to come to (EastXchange) coffee meetings but I can't because I work during the day'

'No, the service is flexible and fits in with me'

'Organising trips, getting people out and together including the children'

#### **15. Would you recommend the service to a friend or family member?**

'Yes! Definitely'

'Yes, absolutely'

'Yes (Interviewer: we talked about a friend she is going to recommend the service to)'



'Yes I would'

'Yes, definitely'

'Yes (she was interested that the service is now self-referral within the MEEBB network and wants to recommend it to a friend)'

'Yes definitely'

### Summary

Respondents seemed very willing to share their experience of the social prescribing service. There was a strong sense of goodwill that the service engendered in respondents who were keen to talk about its impact on them.

Two interviewees had an opportunity to meet and this resulted in one respondent joining the EastXchange project encouraged and welcomed by the other.

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