

# Croydon – Building connection and purpose

## BACKGROUND

Social prescribing is delivered in Croydon by a range of organisations including [Croydon Voluntary Action \(CVA\)](#), [Croydon SocialIP](#) and [Surrey Physio](#), with a number of Link Workers employed directly by Primary Care Networks (PCNs). Many new link workers were only just in post when the Covid-19 pandemic began.

## THE APPROACH

CVA, the voluntary sector infrastructure body in Croydon, has long taken an [Asset-Based Community Development \(ABCD\)](#) approach within its work to building capacity and resilience in the local community. The context of the pandemic and the wider rollout of social prescribing happening in tandem, has provided opportunities to further develop this approach. Our goal is to maximise connectivity between different activities and services across the borough to meet ever increasing need in the community, particularly around social welfare advice.

## Understanding what's there

The initial focus for CVA was on supporting the new team of link workers to understand what already existed within the localities they were working in. Those who came into post prior to Covid-19 restrictions went on walkabouts with Community Builders (another role in Croydon) who are well-acquainted with local assets including services, facilities and community groups. In Croydon link workers' roles incorporate a significant element of building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, as well as acting as an enabler for active citizens. As such, building relationships and understanding the local landscape is vital. Knowledge of services, including those meeting urgent social welfare needs, has been critical during the pandemic.

## TOP TIPS

- **Communities are best placed to know what is best for them**
- **Professionals serve communities well by working together**, sharing not only a digital platform but a vision of how communities can be supported to build up their resilience.
- **Provider collaboratives can use the hub and spokes model to support integrated care** by creating referral pathways and joining up services, using their interconnectivity to provide personalised support for people managing multiple disadvantage.

## One Croydon, One Team

With link workers employed across a range of different organisations, opportunities to come together and learn have been critically important. CVA, via the [One Croydon](#) partnership, convened a Link Worker Forum, initially to identify training and learning needs. The Forum has since expanded to include a wider range of roles including: Care Connectors, Personal Independence Coordinators, Community Builders and Family Guide. The Forum is a key source of peer support and learning. The local statutory and voluntary sector services including the Council's housing department and local advice services attend regularly to share information and build connection. The aim is for referrals to be a handover between connected individuals, not an administrative process.

Croydon's [Community Hubs and Spokes model](#) which connect assets at a locality level aims to increase collaboration and connection. CVA used this model to lead coordinating Croydon's [Community Response Hub](#) to address the challenges of Covid-19.

It's about going in and asking, 'what's happening', not saying 'this is what's happening'.

- Sarah Burns, Head of Communities

## CASE STUDY CONTACT

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## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This case study has been produced by the [Bromley by Bow Centre](#) and [Greater London Authority](#) who are working together to support the development of social prescribing in London.

### Opportunities for learning

From the Link Worker Forum analysis of training needs, CVA has developed a Link Worker Training Programme which covers a range of topics considered high priority. This includes social welfare issues, exacerbated by the pandemic, including housing, welfare benefits and debt, as well as domestic abuse and sexual violence. Training has been delivered in partnership with local statutory and voluntary sector services including [South West London Law Centre](#), Citizens Advice and [Croydon Council's award-winning Gateway team](#) who offer multi-faceted support around income maximisation, debt management, budgeting, housing and training and employment. This has helped to upskill link workers and increase personal connection between services.

### THE BENEFITS

- Increased connection both between link workers and with wider services and community groups in the borough, meaning improved referral processes which don't feel like being passed from pillar to post for patients.
- Improved skills to address social welfare issues, both by identifying them, knowing how to address simple issues and pass them on to the most appropriate team or service.
- Building of capacity within local services, organisations and community groups, through a core focus on the strengths that everyone can bring to the table.

### THE CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge has been the lack of funding following referrals from social prescribing into the voluntary sector to services such as social welfare advice. Behaviour change and health prevention work of all descriptions is the daily work of the voluntary and community sector but is often significantly underfunded. This was the case before the pandemic but demand has since been escalating due to the challenges brought about by or intensified by the pandemic.

### THE OUTCOME

The work of CVA has enabled much more joining up of work and approaches, with high participation from link workers across the borough. This in turn leads to an improved experience for residents who are able to access a more integrated system of support provided by a range of services.

Social welfare issues are addressed holistically with input from a range of different local services across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors who all have a part to play in ensuring that residents needs are effectively and efficiently met.

### RESOURCES

#### Social Prescribing Report

To read more about the work of Croydon Voluntary Action to support social prescribing in Croydon, click [here](#).



For information supporting the voluntary and community sector to deliver on social prescribing please click [here](#).

#### Covid Community Response Hub

To find out more about the Croydon Community Response Hub, click [here](#).



For information on support for social prescribing schemes offered by the Bromley by Bow Centre, please visit: <https://www.bbcb.org.uk/insights/>

#### Croydon's Localities Model

To find out more about the 'Community Hubs and Spokes' approach adopted in Croydon, click [here](#).



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

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