

North Islington – Integrated support for those in need

BACKGROUND

North Islington Primary Care Network (PCN) covers an area with high levels of deprivation and **much of the non-clinical need that presents itself at general practice is around low incomes, poor housing conditions and other issues** which need to be addressed through social welfare advice.

The PCN had worked for some time with a local organisation called Help on Your Doorstep (HOYD) to improve access to social welfare advice for patients. When DES funding for social prescribing link workers came in, given the challenges facing patients in the area and the existing relationship with HOYD, it felt like a natural progression for the organisation to employ link workers with a social welfare advice specialism.

THE APPROACH

HOYD took on two link workers **who fulfil all of the core elements of the link worker role, as well as having experience and training in social welfare advice**, enabling them to directly address issues around welfare benefits, debt and housing rather than always being reliant on an onward referral. The link workers were integrated into both the HOYD and PCN teams to ensure that they were adequately supported and the roles have been operational since February 2020.

They now work alongside a further link worker who is employed by Manor Gardens, a local health and wellbeing charity as well as Health and Wellbeing Peer Coaches as part of an extended social prescribing team which helps to hold people with a range of complex needs and take the strain off of primary care.

TOP TIPS

- **Work with a trusted and experienced organisation** who are appropriately-placed to provide high-quality supervision and support.
- If a link worker takes on a specialist role, **try to ensure they're part of a wider team of people delivering similar support** so that they don't become isolated and can maintain their professional skills and knowledge.
- **Ensure as far as possible that despite the focus of their role, specialised link workers are also well-equipped to make onward referrals for other categories of need.**

THE BENEFITS

There have been a number of positive things to come out of the way the service has been set up including:

- **Improved access to social welfare advice**, one of the services with highest demand amongst patients, leaving less opportunity for drop-off during an onward referral process as can frequently happen
- **Link workers are able to be proactive and address many of the issues they are coming across directly** without the need for onward referral and follow-ups, bringing some degree of efficiency to the service despite the additional workload of addressing issues themselves
- **Strong supervision and peer support to ensure quality of advice** through the wider HOYD team who are highly experienced in this area of work

CASE STUDY CONTACT

Name: Dr Craig Seymour, Clinical Director

Organisation: North Islington Primary Care Network

Website: www.islingtonccg.nhs.uk/YourHealth/primary-care-networks.htm

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.

THE CHALLENGES

The main challenges to date have been ensuring that the service can be appropriately set up with limited funding for the support infrastructure around the roles e.g. supervision and management from within HOYD. It has also been difficult to find funding for evaluation of the service which is an aspiration of all parties. One of the potential challenges that is foreseen is ensuring that the postholders are able to meet the full requirements of the link worker role, particularly in relation to volumes of patients, while also providing more direct support around advice-related issues.

THE OUTCOME

To date the service is working well and meeting real need in North Islington, particularly with a rise in social welfare related issues due to the pandemic. Positive feedback has been received from patients who have accessed the services and it is hoped that it will be possible to fully evaluate the impacts of the service in the future.

“
For us, working in the community we do, tackling the social determinants of health and the impacts of low income and deprivation has been absolutely paramount in our approach to social prescribing.”

- Dr Craig Seymour,
North Islington PCN

RESOURCES

Help On Your Doorstep

For more information on the work of Help On Your Doorstep, visit their website here:

www.helponyourdoorstep.com/social-prescribing

Islington social prescribing webpage

For more information on social prescribing in Islington, visit the CCG page here:

<https://gps.islingtonccg.nhs.uk/service/islington-pcn-social-prescribing-link-workers>

LONDON
SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

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

**Bromley
by Bow
Centre**

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

london plus

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

CASE STUDY CONTACT

Name: Dr Craig Seymour, Clinical Director

Organisation: North Islington Primary Care Network

Website: www.islingtonccg.nhs.uk/YourHealth/primary-care-networks.htm

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.