

BACKGROUND

Well Connected is Lanarkshire's social prescribing programme for mental health and wellbeing. The multi-agency programme, launched in 2012, aims to support individuals and communities to maintain good mental wellbeing. It seeks to link individuals with a range of non-medical services in the local area that provide support to improve mental health and wellbeing, and help to address the underlying issues that have a detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing.

This multi-disciplinary programme involves a range of partners, including NHS Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire council and the Third Sector. From the outset, each partner has recognised the potential for existing resources to be employed in Well Connected, leading to the development of a sustainable, assets-based programme.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS FOR SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

From the outset, partnership working has been recognised as an essential aspect of Well Connected. A pilot social prescribing programme, based in Lanarkshire's libraries, provided valuable learning that has informed the planning and delivery of Well Connected. The pilot underlined the importance of partnership working for social prescribing. It also gave an opportunity to test out staff training, processes that required to be implemented and what knowledge and information staff required to deliver a social prescribing process. It also gave an opportunity to identify barriers and solutions to these. Learning from the pilot informed the development of Well Connected.

In preparation for Well Connected, a joint steering group was convened with representation from a range of local organisations and services. The group continues to meet. This has helped key partners to establish relationships with one another at a strategic level and to build trust through working together.

Well Connected takes an assets-based approach, harnessing and mobilising expertise and services already in place across Lanarkshire to provide a sustainable social prescribing programme. As part of this approach, gaps and inconsistencies in service provision were identified and addressed by the steering group.

The existing evidence base around mental health and wellbeing, various national and local policy drivers and common strategic aims are all factors that have encouraged participation across a range of organisations. These factors have helped foster a high level of buy-in and enthusiasm for social prescribing from agencies across Lanarkshire. It has helped attract representatives with sufficient decision-making authority and level of leadership to the steering group.

The relationships established via the steering group have helped partners to develop an understanding of how others work, the language they use, the barriers faced, and the opportunities available. That knowledge, plus learning from the pilot, helped inform the development of detailed pathways.

The pathways take into account the finer detail around systems and processes to support individuals in accessing and making use of services. They include various layers of support in recognition of the fact that the needs of individuals will vary. Through contact with Well Connected, people can access information, be signposted to a service, receive a brief intervention or access intensive support depending on their needs.

As well as ensuring healthy partnerships exist across the steering group, the importance of good working relationships amongst those delivering Well Connected on a day to day basis has also been recognised. Speed networking events are one example of how service providers have been able to develop a good understanding of what others offer and when it might be appropriate to signpost an individual. A co-ordinated approach is taken to providing information to GP practices. This minimises the number of visits to practices from referral services and reduces the frequency of paper-based information received.

To ensure services are supported to deliver the programme, each one has a single point of contact within NHS Lanarkshire. Well Connected Champions offer support and assistance to services as they require it.

IMPLEMENTATION FACILITATORS

1. Context

Well Connected was developed in a wider national and local context that acknowledged the role non-medical interventions could make to promoting good mental health and wellbeing at both individual and community level. The importance of supporting individuals to recognise and tackle existing issues was also highlighted.

National and local policies have provided system-wide motivation for a shift towards non-medical interventions for mental health and wellbeing. This has been coupled with the availability of various evidence-based resources that have all added to a broader understanding of how good mental health and wellbeing might be supported. There is broad appreciation of the opportunities social prescribing can offer.

These factors have helped to create an environment in which developing approaches to mental health and wellbeing has been accepted and encouraged.

2. Piloting the approach

The pilot meant that barriers were recognised and, as far as possible, solutions built in to the planning for Well Connected. It informed the development of detailed pathways, and the provision of staff training and how it should be delivered.

A number of other important lessons were highlighted by the pilot. Examples are: the importance of taking time to build partnerships, the need to develop a mutual understanding of the language within different sectors/areas, and the need to appreciate that each partner will face barriers and find there are facilitators within their specific area of work.

3. Profile of the programme

Well Connected has benefited from a high level of buy-in and the involvement of representatives from partner organisations who have a level of seniority and ability to make key decisions. The profile enjoyed by the programme is helped by the fact that the Scottish Government requires regular updates on social prescribing. Commitment is secured at a strategic level by embedding social prescribing within the Community Planning Partners performance management structures and process such as Single Outcome Agreements, Health Efficiency and Access Targets (HEAT) and locally agreed Joint Priority monitoring. Reporting on progress means the programme remains high on the agenda for senior leaders within Lanarkshire which brings clear practical benefits.

4. Taking an assets-based approach

Recognising and making the best possible use of existing knowledge, skills and expertise locally has been enormously beneficial. It means that Well Connected is a sustainable programme with no requirement for significant investment.

In terms of the staff delivering to programme on a day-to-day basis, the approach taken has helped staff to understand Well Connected as part of their 'normal' job because staff are doing what they have always done in just a slightly different way. This means that Well Connected is not seen as an additional area of work. The result is that staff feel a sense of ownership and feedback on their experience of delivering Well Connected has been positive.

Local infrastructures to support Well Connected were already in place. These formed a basis for partnership working. Improved co-ordination, the identification of common aims and objectives, and the introduction of systems and processes helped create conditions in which partnerships could flourish.

KEY LEARNING

- Clear leadership is important to delivery of a focused and co-ordinated programme. The involvement of individuals at all levels with shared aims has been hugely beneficial to Well Connected.
- The enthusiasm and motivation of staff delivering services has been essential to Well Connected. A sense of ownership and a clear understanding of their contribution is helpful for staff engagement.
- Piloting the approach was enormously beneficial. It meant that plans for Well Connected were informed by experience of delivering a social prescribing programme in the local area. Barriers identified during the pilot were limited at the planning stage of Well Connected.
- Common aims, an understanding of variation in language used by partners, and an appreciation of the barriers and opportunities that exist in different services are key

elements in establishing effective partnerships. Time is needed both for the development of relationships and to maintain them.

For further information:

<http://www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx>

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