

Connector Toolkit

A guide to setting up and running Connector Programmes
2024

Jenny Hartnoll

Desi Gradinarova (Heritage Connectors)

Professor JR Baker (Monitoring and Evaluation)

In partnership with



National
Academy
for Social
Prescribing



Australian
Social Prescribing
Association of Researchers
and Educators



Thank you to the Lockwood Charitable Foundation for funding the time to create this toolkit and also the time to support organisations to explore, adapt and implement connector programmes. Thank you to Lyne Ouellet and Sam Evans for your input into the toolkit.

weareconnectors.org

Contents

03 Introduction to Connectors

- 04 What are Connectors and why do we need them?
- 06 Types of Connectors
- 07 Who can be a Connector and benefits
- 08 How do Connectors fit with other similar training?

09 Section 1 Focus on Community Connectors

- 10 What are Community Connectors?
- 12 Identify, enhance or create Information Access Points
- 14 Step one: Find out if a Community Connector programme is wanted or needed
- 15 Step two: Bring people together to co-create the Community Connector programme
- 16 Step three: Decide on the overarching vision
- 16 Step four: Secure funding
- 17 Step five: Decide who will train the Community Connectors
- 18 Step six: Consider who will be your Community Connectors
- 19 Step seven: Develop Community Connector training content
- 24 Step eight: Plan and deliver training sessions
- 25 Step nine: Create additional resources
- 26 Step ten: Promote training
- 27 Step eleven: Encourage ongoing Community Connector engagement
- 28 Step twelve: Plan and implement monitoring and evaluation
- 34 Step thirteen: Celebrate and recognise achievements
- 35 Conclusion

36 Health Connections Mendip Case Study

- 37 Background
- 37 Needs Assessment

- 38 Creating Information Access Points
- 39 Funding of the Community Connector programme
- 40 Staffing
- 41 Creating and delivering the training
- 42 Promotion of the training
- 43 Monitoring and Evaluation
- 46 Feedback
- 48 Connecting Materials
- 48 Celebration and keeping in touch
- 48 Expanding the Connector role

49 Section 2 Topic Based Connectors overview

- 50 What are Topic Based Connectors?
- 51 Heritage Connector Case Study**
- 52 Background
- 52 The aim of the project
- 53 Co-creation of the Heritage Connector Programme – what needs to be in place to establish the scheme
- 55 Recommendations and learnings from the initial stages of the Heritage Connectors project
- 56 Heritage Connectors Training creation – promotion and outreach
- 60 Monitoring and evaluation
- 61 What the project succeeded in doing
- 62 Funding
- 63 Conclusion

64 Section 3 Organisation Based Connectors overview

- 65 What are Organisation Based Connectors?

66 Contact details and support

Purpose

This toolkit serves as a resource, offering guidance, tools and case studies for those wanting to set up a Connector programme that can be adapted to different localities.

Intended Audience

The toolkit is for anyone, anywhere who wants to set up a Connector programme. It is aimed at those who want to build a movement of people making a difference by passing on information to friends, family, neighbours and strangers.

Anyone can use this toolkit for initiating or growing a Connector programme. People taking this toolkit forwards might be community members wanting to create change, health professionals wanting to integrate better into the community, councils wanting to pass on public health messages or Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations wanting to pass on information about their service.

Connector programmes can be adapted for any message or any organisation as long as the core purpose is to pass on simple information which then leads to further support and opportunities.



What are Connectors and why do we need them?

In many communities, there exists a disconnect between individuals and the support, resources, and opportunities available to them that might help them improve their health and wellbeing. This disconnect often stems from a lack of awareness of these resources. Imagine someone facing a challenge or seeking assistance, but they are unaware of the services and resources that could potentially help them navigate through their situation.

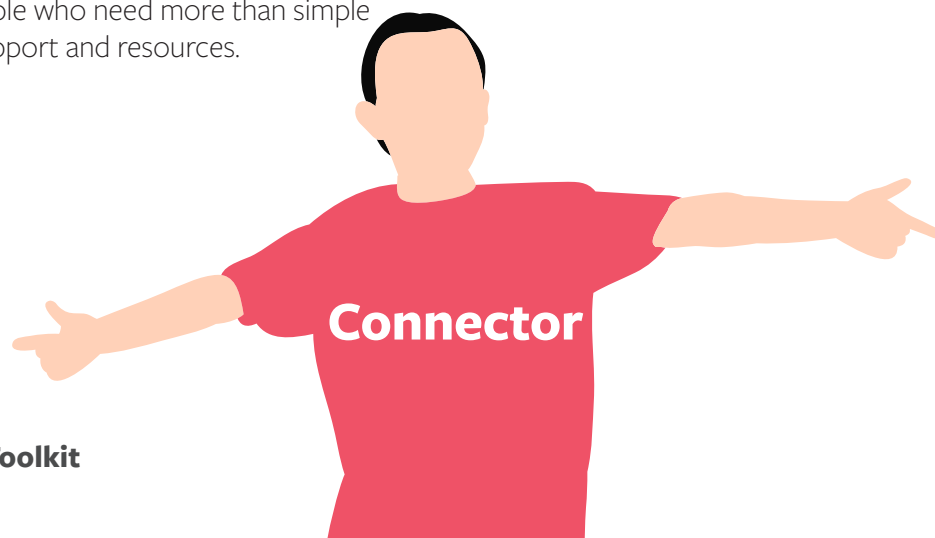
If someone doesn't know about support, resources, and opportunities, they essentially don't exist to them.

This gap in awareness can have significant implications, contributing to social isolation, limited access to services, and missed opportunities for improving health and wellbeing. It perpetuates cycles of disadvantage and inequality, as individuals miss out on the resources and support they need.

Roles such as Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWS) are in place to help those who may want support in accessing information or who may have more complex lives and need the time and space to explore what matters to them. However, it is also important to value and build back information transfer to the communities where it has traditionally sat - this compliments the work of the SPLWs by enabling simple signposts to happen in the community and free up the SPLWs to work with people who need more than simple signposting to support and resources.

In every community, there have always been those who serve as connectors – the idea is not new. These people have played an essential role in passing knowledge and understanding within communities often in the simplest of day-to-day interactions without any recognition of the role they instinctively undertake. Yet significant transformations have taken place in knowledge dissemination which has become easier for some to access yet for others it may be too diffuse, too overwhelming, difficult to access or seemingly hidden. So now, more than ever, we need to take a lead from what happens naturally in communities and build on it.

Enter the role of Connectors. Connectors participate in a brief training session or workshop that equips them with the tools to share simple, brief signposting messages with friends, family, neighbours, colleagues and strangers, if the opportunity arises. They do not build rapport, nudge or advise nor do they take on the role of formal volunteers who have had more in-depth training. They do not require further training, support nor police checks. Connectors operate in a very light touch way and simply signpost. It is not a formal role but just a community member empowered with information that they can pass on to others. They serve as vital conduits, breaking down barriers with the aim that everyone has access to the help and resources they need.



What are Connectors and why do we need them?

Connectors can be anyone and everyone within communities – taxi drivers, hairdressers, students, teachers, housebound individuals, support group members, homeless people and carers to name but a few. People who train as Connectors can be those who naturally make connections and talk to others. Yet Connectors may also be those who are far less likely to connect with lots of people. In fact, they may never pass on information to others but may benefit from knowing about the support themselves and feeling part of a larger movement of people who want to make a difference.

Connectors may also pass on information to only a few people but they may be just the people who might not have found out the information unless it was from someone they know and trust in their community. Whether someone signposts scores of people a year or just one, both are equally valid and valued.

Connectors are just one part of the solution to making resources known. Recognising that communities have always possessed the ability to connect and pass on information is crucial; it's about rebuilding this inherent capacity within communities, where it has always belonged. By democratizing information and giving it back to communities where it has traditionally sat, Connectors may enable individuals to take control of their circumstances and access the help and resources they need.

Connectors bridge the gap between individuals and resources, making the invisible visible and ensuring that what was once unknown becomes accessible to all.

NB It is important to note and value the fact that others in various fields have used the term 'connector' to refer to different roles. In the toolkit we use the term 'connector' as described above but areas should choose a term that works well in their community.

Types of Connectors

There are three main types of Connectors.

1

Community Connectors

who know about 'Information Access Points' and therefore promote the wide range of services, support, activities and opportunities available within communities.

2

Topic-based Connectors

e.g. Nature, Football, Heritage, What Matters to Me, 5 Ways to Wellbeing, Stop Smoking, Pain Management, etc. These Connectors pass on information about the benefits of a particular topic and/or how to access them in their community.

3

Organisation-based Connectors

e.g. Library, Men's Shed UK, Social Prescribing Service etc. These Connectors pass on information about what a particular organisation provides in their community.

Who can be a Connector and benefits

Everyone has the potential to become a Connector. It is not a professional role nor a formal volunteer role; it's open to individuals from all walks of life.

Whether you're a sixth form student, a police officer, a member of a support group, someone experiencing homelessness, a shop assistant, a GP, a stay-at-home parent, a hairdresser, a housebound individual, or a teacher, you can step into the role of a Connector. The brief training has been designed for anyone and everyone. It's not exclusively tailored for those who are already considered community leaders who want to bridge gaps between people. It's equally, and perhaps more importantly, relevant for those who might feel excluded and sense a lack of connection in their communities.

Enhancing awareness about support and opportunities brings advantages for people trained as Connectors, those who are signposted to support and to communities.

Benefits for Connectors: By becoming Connectors, individuals experience a sense of empowerment, knowledge, and active participation in their community. While some Connectors may not find themselves sharing information frequently, others might integrate it into their everyday conversations with those around them – both cases are valuable. Even if a Connector doesn't regularly pass on information, they can still benefit from acquiring valuable knowledge and from feeling connected with a network of individuals working towards information dissemination. Others may find it useful for their job and or may find it helps with their curriculum vitae (CV). It may also boost self-esteem and confidence.

Benefits for those connected: Those who are connected to support and opportunities may benefit from finding out information that they might not otherwise have known about, and this may go on to help improve their health and wellbeing. Knowing about support and opportunities offers people hope and choice and may help the person make informed choices about their health and wellbeing. It might be that the person never takes up the opportunities or support but just knowing that there is a support system in place can reduce stress and anxiety. The act of kindness of receiving the information may encourage the person to go on to do the same to others.

Benefits to the community: It not only benefits the Connectors and those they signpost but also extends to the wider community. By disseminating information via Connectors, communities can bridge information gaps in ways that may resonate more effectively than conventional channels, such as posters, social media, press and newsletters. Connectors passing on messages to others in their community can potentially narrow inequalities by reaching individuals who might otherwise remain uninformed. It also increases awareness of those services that have been signposted to.

This approach holds the potential to foster a robust sense of community cohesion and a collective drive for positive change.

Ultimately, the act of connecting is more than simple information-sharing; it's about cultivating a culture of mutual support and community connectedness.

How do Connectors fit with other similar training?

There are a multitude of training programmes aimed at equipping individuals to effectively convey messages to others. This spectrum encompasses roles ranging from Health Champions and Community Ambassadors to Make Every Contact Count and Dementia Friends. It's important to recognise that the structure, names and interpretation of these roles and training can vary significantly across different communities.

The aim is that Connectors integrate into and complement the fabric of an active citizens/volunteer ecosystem as message givers. In order to do this well, it is important to know and potentially map this ecosystem in any area that is interested in implementing a Connector programme.

Each area will be different, but it is a good starting point to see if 'connector' training is needed and what to call the training and those trained so it fits with your area.

The term 'connector' may be used differently in your area so do use a name that resonates with your community.

Right: Message giver ecosystem example.

Social Prescribing Link Workers or similar roles – paid roles who, as part of their work, signpost to support and opportunities. These roles would be trained to give specific information, to use coaching skills to build rapport and work alongside people to discuss what matters to them.

Champion type roles with an element of message giving – these are often people in paid roles or volunteers who have done extra training often seen as people 'with influence' in their community. They may need to report back on their interactions or be supported as volunteers.

Examples might include:

- Make Every Contact Count
- RSPH (Royal Society for Public Health) Health Champion
- COVID champions
- Core20PLUS

Citizen training – training to become aware of a topic but not necessarily pass on messages.

- Dementia Friend

Citizen training – training to become aware of a topic and then to **pass it on** if there is the opportunity. It does not involve building rapport or offering further support. Not just targeted those who are 'influential' in their community

- Community Connector
- Nature Connector
- Heritage Connector
- Football Connector
- Stop Smoking Connector
- Creative Connector
- Planning Ahead Connector
- 5 Ways to Wellbeing Connector
- etc

Section 1

Focus on Community Connectors

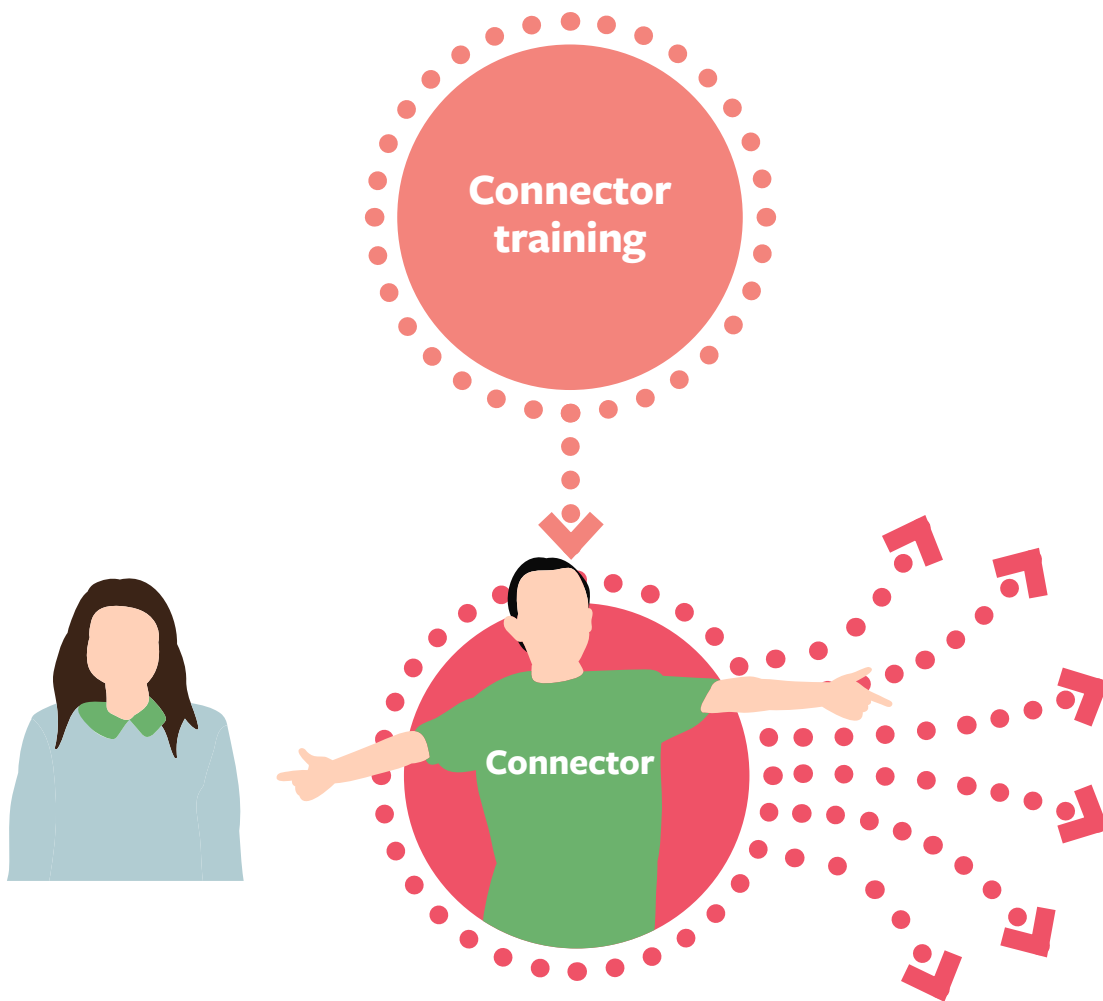
Section one of this toolkit focusses on Community Connectors.



What are Community Connectors?

Community Connectors pass on information about Information Access Points in their community. This enables them to increase access to and knowledge about the huge amount of support and resources there are in their area.

Imagine the impact if an entire community knew about all the support and opportunities, for themselves and others alike – that is the goal of a Community Connector programme.



What are Community Connectors?

There are a number of steps that can be used to implement a Community Connector programme which are outlined in this toolkit.



Identify, enhance or create Information Access Points

In order for Community Connectors to let people know about the support, information and resources in an area, someone has to have mapped the groups, projects, organisations, information and resources and created ways for people to then access this information. We call these Information Access Points.

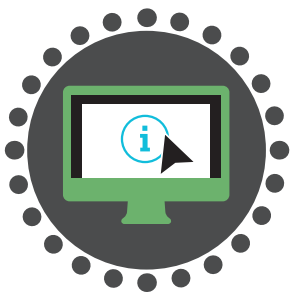
People access information in different ways therefore it is good to have different Information Access Points. Ideally these would be a website (for those who are comfortable going online), a phone line and a physical place. An area might want to build up to having several Information Access Points but for a Community Connector programme to work, a website is an essential component. These Information Access Points might already be in an area, so it is important to find this out to avoid duplication. The needs assessment should identify its Information Access Points before proceeding to develop a Community Connector program.

It is important to consider that the Information Access Points need to be easily remembered by Community Connectors.

Consideration also needs to be given to the access points and how to sustain them in the long term in order to give a consistent, strong, reliable message to the community.

Once the Information Access Point/Points have been identified, a community can proceed to create a Community Connector programme.

Identifying, enhancing or create Information Access Points



Information Access Point – web directory

Areas often have multiple website directories. Areas would need to decide which website the Community Connectors signpost to. If it is a pre-existing web directory, is it fit for purpose? A wider consideration would also be who keeps the website up to date. It is important that it is easy to update the directory. It may mean that those who are closest to the community and perhaps working with people who need the information, are best placed to update the website directory. If there is not an obvious website directory in the area, then this would need to be considered before starting a Community Connector programme. An area might decide that one of the key messages is that there are two websites, one for children and one for adults for example. As long as the key messages that the Community Connectors pass on are simple, easy to remember and agreed on with key stakeholders.



Information Access Point – physical place

Some people may not want to go online, nor use a phone to find out information about support, resources and activities. They may want to speak to someone in person. In different areas, there will be different places that people can go to. In some areas it might be a library, a community centre, a Chatty Café, a Talking Café or a Community Sitting Room. The important thing is that if a Community Connector signposts to this place, there will be someone there who can give them the information that they might want. The person at this access point would need access to the website directory in order to give good, up to date information. As with all access points, this would need to be decided on with key stakeholders.



Information Access Point – phone line

Ideally an area would have a phone line which acts as an Information Access Point that someone could call to find out about information and support in their community. This might be a line held by the local Social Prescribing Link worker service or it could be a phone line hosted by a town council for example. The important thing is that whoever holds the phone line has access to the website directory and that this access point is decided on with key stakeholders.



Information Access Point – physical place

In some areas they have also considered those people who may not want to enter a building so they have Information Access Point outside. For example Talking Benches, where a worker is there each week to give people the information that they might want. Once again, it is important for this person to have access to the web directory in order to pass on information.

Step 1

Find out if a Community Connector programme is wanted or needed

A needs assessment is as a foundational step in developing a Community Connector programme, underscoring the importance of understanding the unique dynamics, needs, and strengths of the community.

A needs assessment involves engaging with community members, local leaders, and stakeholders to gather diverse perspectives. This collaborative approach ensures that the programme's design is rooted in the community's lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns. By actively involving a range of stakeholders in the process, the programme fosters a sense of ownership, builds on what is already there, avoids duplication and empowers all to contribute to shaping solutions.

- What is already happening in your area? Are people already doing something similar with regards to Connector training?
- Are there similar roles or training? If so, see how it all fits together in a shared narrative – map the ecosystem of this type of training/role (see page 8). Is there the opportunity to co-create a shared narrative of the 'message giver' training ecosystem in your area? It is essential to avoid duplication.
- Look beyond your area as something similar may be happening out of your area but nearby.
- If there are not Community Connectors in your area, do people think it is a good idea? How do you check this? What methods, such as surveys, focus groups, or community meetings, can you use to find out if Community Connectors are needed?
- Do you have the Information Access Points in place that you want the Community Connectors to signpost to? Is there a website directory? Are there lots of directories? Are there physical places where people can find out information?
- If there aren't access points then, as a minimum, a website directory needs to be in place before a Connector training programme can be in place.

Step 2

Bring people together to cocreate the Community Connector programme

Prioritising active involvement from stakeholders at every stage of the programme's design, implementation, and evaluation supports its sustainability, reduces duplication and resonates more deeply with the community's unique context, preferences, and requirements.

Where: Identify your geographical boundaries eg Integrated Care System (ICS), council area, city or town. The area you want to cover will help dictate who you bring to the table.

Who: From the beginning identify who might share the vision/goals of the programme. Who might directly benefit? Who might contribute to its success? Who has expertise or resources to bring to the table? Who has the right expertise and community connections to lead on the programme? Stakeholders might include voluntary sector organisations, Social Prescribing Link Worker service provider, council and community members etc

How: It is important to engage with local businesses, community leaders, community members and relevant public organisations to ensure a well-rounded approach at every stage of the programme? How will you do this?

What: Consider what information, support and involvement you are seeking from these organisations. You may want to consider what a steering group might do, who will be responsible for oversight and leading the programme, and what kind of funding will you need. You may need to create a new network of collaborators or tap into something that already exists.

Step 3

Decide on the overarching vision

It is important to have a shared vision for the Community Connector programme. Bring people together to create and share this. Questions you may want to consider include:

- How do you envision the future in terms of accomplishments for the short term (one year), mid-term (three years), and long term (five years)?
- How do you effectively convey the envisioned outcomes of the connector initiative?
- How do you ensure that the community is on board and cocreates this vision?
- How can you ensure that all the work from training content through to communication resonates with all from the community, promoting inclusivity and understanding?
- Are there any target groups you would like to train? People often receive messages best from those they know and trust.
- Would you want to create other types of connector training in the future?
- How many people would you like to train in short, medium and long term?
- Are there any scalability considerations for training connectors if the programme proves successful and expands in the future?

Step 4

Secure funding

Once the Information Access Points are in place, running a Community Connector programme is relatively low cost. You will need a trainer, admin support and running costs such as room hire. You may want to consider:

- What is the proposed budget for the connector programme? Have you estimated the costs involved in terms of staffing, training, resources, outreach, and any related expenses?
- Who will fund the work? Have you identified any potential funding sources?
- Is there an opportunity to pool resources and staff from various stakeholders, partners, or organisations to ensure a sustainable foundation for the programme? Can staff be allocated some time out of their existing roles to help deliver or promote the training?
- Could the work sit under a Health Coaching or Social Prescribing Link Worker service and be part of their offer to the community?

Step 5

Decide who will train the Community Connectors

Success of the program involves identifying adaptable and confident trainers. They will ultimately have an impact on training outcomes.

In identifying the best trainers, consider who has the knowledge, skills and confidence to train a large group of 50 or more through to small audiences and individual community members. The trainer will need to have a flexible and adaptable approach in order to provide formal sessions or impromptu 'training' conversations on the street. They must be capable of conveying the fundamentals of the training in formats such as virtual sessions, eLearning, video modules, in-person sessions that do not incorporate electronic devices or in-person presentations using Power Point. They need to have an eye to maximizing accessibility, meaning training may need multiple formats to accommodate diverse needs.

It's worth exploring if the training could be integrated into the Social Prescribing Link Worker (SPLW) or similar service offerings. People who are coming to the end of their sessions with a SPLW may want to train as a Community Connector in their final session. For certain individuals, training as a Community Connector could address their need for engagement, purpose, social interaction, and community connection and that may be the only contact they may need with the SPLW service or similar. In such cases, the whole SPLW team might want to become trainers. The Community Connector training could also be included as a session within, for example, a Healthy Lifestyle Programme.

It might be that train the trainer could be considered but thought would need to be put into how these trainers are supported and what happens if the main training is updated and modified.

- Is there an organisation that will host the trainer?
- Are there already trainers who could add this to their role?

Step 6

Consider who will be your Community Connectors

It is really important to understand that anyone and everyone can be a Community Connector. The unique element to this programme is that it is open to all and there is no obligation on the Community Connectors to do anything once they are trained. There are many reasons that people train as Community Connectors. The training is not just aimed at those who are seen to be influential in their community.

- Consider the reasons that someone might want to be a Community Connector. This will help you understand how to reach those people to let them know about the training. (see page 26)
- How can you ensure that the Community Connectors are representative of the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within the community?
- Are there particular demographic or interest-based groups within the community that may benefit from Community Connector training?
- Use 'many ways to many' ie try to train many people in many ways that are appropriate to them.
- As well as reaching out to people who may not usually do such training, it is also important to reach those who are more likely to engage as these people will help amplify the training messages and can also help tell other people about the training.
- Some people may want to do the training to enhance their role, in which case they will need to consider when they have their Community Connector hat on and when they move into their other paid or volunteer role.

Step 7

Develop Community Connector training content

There are some key points that need to be considered and included in the Community Connector training. At the heart of the Community Connector model is making the training available to those who would not typically attend such a programme. Having adaptable, flexible training versions is key as this will serve to increase its reach. It will increase both the number who are trained and consequently the number of community members who are then signposted to the access points.

- The key messages about Information Access Points that the Community Connectors pass on should be simple, easy to remember and agreed on with key stakeholders.
- It is important that Community Connectors realise that they don't have to signpost to the huge amount of support in the community. They simply signpost to the Information Access Points. This message needs to be really clear and reiterated many times in the training.
- The training should include the reason why Community Connectors don't signpost to all the support that is available. The reason being that the Community Connector wouldn't be able to remember all the support that is out there, they might give out of date information, it is not their role to pass on specific information about specific groups or services and it would be working outside their training as a Community Connector.
- The training should explain how a Community Connector simply signposts. It should explain how they do not move into building rapport, as it would be out of their Community Connector remit. A few example sentences of how to signpost would be useful to include.
- If someone is training as a Community Connector as part of their role which does include building rapport etc then it is important for the person to understand where the Community Connector role ends and where their professional role starts.
- A key part of the training is that Community Connectors are able to pass on messages about access points. Consider the ways that Community Connectors can best retain the key messages they learn. Consider options like business cards or postcards.
- When considering the title of the training, would "training" or "workshop" resonate more effectively with your community?
- Get feedback on the training before rolling it out. Involve various groups and individuals to test the training.
- Be open to improvements in the training over time. If improvements are made, how would this information be cascaded to trainers?
- Make sure the training content can be adapted to be presented in different formats such as power point, large presentation lever arch files and in a format with simple prompts. Over time the training content may be adapted and developed into digital training formats.
- Make sure all programme materials, communication, training and outreach are accessible to everyone and focus on inclusivity and flexibility.
- It is important to take participants on a journey of discovery in the training. See the following lesson plan for the journey.

Community Connector lesson plan

Objective:

By the end of this training session, participants will understand the building blocks to health and wellbeing, learn about Information Access Points, understand what a Community Connector is, see the benefits of Connectors and be ready to connect if they wish to.

Introduction (15 minutes):

1) Elicit Thoughts on Health and Well-being:

- Facilitate an open discussion on what participants believe impacts health and well-being.

2) Introduce Building Blocks:

- Present 'building blocks' of health and wellbeing.
- Link the 'building blocks' to what people had mentioned earlier.

Information Access and Community Resources (20 minutes):

1) Elicit Knowledge of Community Support:

- Engage participants in sharing existing knowledge of local support, services, resources and projects.

2) Ways People Find Information:

- Elicit from participants the methods they use to find information in their community eg posters, social media, press, papers, friends, radio etc.
- Discussion around these and how some people miss out on information and the consequence of missing out. Discuss how this could be improved.

3) Introduce Website:

- Demonstrate the website directory that consolidates all the above community information.
- Discuss its benefits in providing a centralised hub for resources/information.

4) Introduce 'Many Ways to Many' Concept:

- Highlight that while the website is a valuable tool, some individuals may prefer/need other methods of accessing information that the website directory holds. Emphasize the importance of information being accessible and how this has led to the creation of Information Access Points.

Continued

Step 7: Create the Community Connector Content

Community Connector lesson plan

5) Introduce Information Access Points:

- Define and discuss the concept of Information Access Points where individuals can get information in ways that suit them best – online, by phone or in person.
- Ask participants how people then find out about the Information Access Points. This is where you then explain that it is here that the Community Connector come in to play.

Role of the Community Connector (10 minutes):

1) Explain role of Connector:

- Explain the role of Community Connectors is simply to signpost to these Information Access Points.
- Anyone can be a connector.
- Emphasize the simplicity of the role and its focus on general signposting.
- Discuss that connecting can just happen opportunistically.
- Some may connect lots and others not at all. Both are fine.
- Show the website directory and demonstrate how much information it holds.
- Elicit why Community Connectors can't signpost to specific groups, services or resources eg too much info to remember, may give wrong time or details etc
- Explain that there are other roles that might support people with active listening, building rapport, following up with the person, passing on telephone numbers, but this is not what Community Connectors do.

Connecting in Action (15 mins):

1) Connecting Well (Role-Play):

- Role-play simple signposting scenario.
- Elicit what went well and why.

2) Connecting Beyond Role (Role-Play):

- Role-play scenario where active listening and rapport-building go beyond simple signposting.
- Elicit why it went beyond the Connector role.

3) Connecting Badly (Role-Play):

- Role-play scenario where over-empathizing, sharing personal stories and giving own number occur.
- Elicit what went wrong and why.

Continued

Step 7: Create the Community Connector Content

Community Connector lesson plan

4) Encourage adherence to role boundaries:

- Reiterate key points that Community Connectors should and should not do.
- Discuss when Community Connectors may have their Connector hat on or a friend/family/professional hat on.
- Discuss other roles that may help with more in-depth conversations and support and how these fits in and complement Connectors.

Benefits of Being a Community Connector (15 minutes):

1) Elicit Benefits for Community Connectors:

- Discuss the benefits of being a Community Connector.
- Show benefits.

2) Elicit Benefits for the Connected Individuals:

- Explore the positive outcomes for individuals who are connected through Community Connectors.
- Show benefits and discuss the potential for improved well-being and increased access to support.

3) Elicit benefits for the community:

- Explore benefits to wider community. Encourage curiosity of what the impact might be for wider community.

Local focus and impact (5 mins):

1) Local Stats and Photos:

- Share local statistics and success stories, if available.
- Use visuals to reinforce the impact of community connections.

Conclusion and Readiness Assessment (10 minutes):

1) Emphasise Individual Impact:

- Stress that even connecting one person may make a significant difference. Encourage participants to recognize their potential influence. Let people know that they don't have to connect, if they don't want to.

2) Ask Readiness to Be a Community Connector:

- Gauge participants' readiness to take on the role of a Community Connector.
- Allow for questions and discussions.

Continued

Step 7: Create the Community Connector Content

Community Connector lesson plan

3) Closing:

- Summarise key takeaways and express appreciation for participants attending the training.
- Discuss ways to keep in touch to socialise, give feedback on how they are getting on and where to get more materials eg postcards to give to others when they run out.
- Signpost to future training dates to pass on to others if they get the opportunity.
- Give certificates and badges (if appropriate)
- Take photo if appropriate (get consent)
- Give feedback forms.

Note:

Adjust the timing and content based on the specific needs and dynamics of your training session.

Step 8

Plan and deliver training sessions

Once a trainer is in place and training has been created it is then time to get out there and provide the training.

- Depending on the audience the training could be virtual, eLearning, video, in person with no devices, in person with PowerPoint etc. Remember that to reach as many people as possible, there may need to be multiple ways of providing the training to suit different people's needs and preferences.
- A key part of the Connector model is that the training can be offered to those who would not usually attend training sessions. So it is important to have versions of the training that might be in more accessible formats, short versions and versions that could, for example, be done opportunistically on a park bench. It is this flexibility of training that makes the connector training special. There are times when the training may need to be delivered without training materials. The trainer will need to be able to remember the training.
- There could be regular training sessions open to the public which could be advertised. It is important for the trainer to realise that putting on regular training sessions will attract the people who feel comfortable attending training sessions. The trainer will also need to walk the streets, talk to people in shops and book in training for their staff, drop into support groups to book in training or even do it then and there. The trainer can also look to where large numbers of people gather and offer it there – for example places of worship, schools and places of work.
- The strength of Connector training is that the trainer gets out into the community and provides training as, when and how it suits those in the community. The trainer may well have a background in community development in order to feel comfortable and confident in this way of working.
- Is there a plan in place for expanding the training programme, possibly training additional trainers to amplify its reach? If so, how will new trainers be trained and updated?
- Consider embedding the Community Connector programme into the Social Prescribing Link Worker (or similar service) offer? Some people may train as Community Connectors after having seen the benefits of working with a SPLW as it might be the answer to that person's need to feel involved, have a sense of purpose, meet people and feel more connected to their community. Could this be offered one to one as the final session with a SPLW? Or could it be the final session in a group programme eg Healthy Lifestyles or Pain Management Programme?

Step 9

Create additional resources

As well as creating the training in different formats, consideration will need to be given to other materials that are part of the programme.

- Create postcards or business cards for new Community Connectors to hand out to people with the Information Access Points on.
- Consider badges for the Community Connectors. Is it appropriate to give community members badges or would it be seen as implying that that person was in a more formal role which is more than simple signposting? Would it just be more appropriate to give the badges to people who use the connector training messages as part of their paid/formal volunteering role?
- In terms of recognition, also consider offering certificates.
- In order to evaluate the training, pre and post surveys will need to be created. Consider methods for collecting this information that can be adapted to the audience. Tools such as Survey Monkey can be used but consideration needs to be given to those who are digitally excluded, have low literacy levels and those who might not have the time or interest in filling in a survey.
- What methods will be used for people to book on to regular training? Eventbrite or similar could be useful but once again, consider those for whom this might be a barrier. Can people call up to book or even just turn up without booking?
- If you are providing online training, which platform will you use? If you are providing digital training and you don't have your own training platform such as Thinkific, Articulate or Mighty Networks, will another organisation let you use their training platform?

Step 10

Promote training

It is important to build in a plan of regular promotion of the training offer. This includes the regular sessions, those that can be provided inhouse to groups and organisations and opportunistic training.

- How will the Connector training be promoted? Radio, newspaper, social media, leaflets, posters, newsletters, walking the streets, visiting groups and businesses etc.
- Promotion by those who have already trained is a good way to reach those who might not access information about the training in other ways. How would those trained as Community Connectors know about when the next training sessions are? Would it be through the Information Access Points? If so, the training dates and booking would need to be known to the paid workers staffing the Information Access Points.
- Consider the 'many ways to many'. People receive or like to receive information in different ways. Therefore it is important to promote the training in as many ways as possible.
- Will this promotion be done by the Community Connector trainer? It needs to be done by someone who is happy to talk to anyone and everyone and someone who is organised and plans well.
- What do you think would be the motivations for people to become connectors? This might inform how you can identify future connectors.

Step 11

Encourage ongoing Community Connector engagement

Once Community Connectors are trained, some like to feel connected to the work whereas others just do the training and have no interest in keeping in touch. It is good to build in ways that Community Connectors can keep engaged if they wish to.

- Consider implementing things like newsletters, social media updates, regular virtual or in-person meet-ups, or utilising established community spaces like Talking Cafes to facilitate regular meetups for the trained Community Connectors.
- Are there strategies in place to ensure that these engagement mechanisms are accessible and inclusive for all Community Connectors, regardless of their background or abilities?
- Some Community Connectors may want to be part of this ongoing engagement whereas others may just want to attend the training session and not be part of any ongoing engagement. It is important to value both.
- Additional ideas for engagement will become clear over time and those trained will come up with ideas.
- If items such as business cards or postcards are used to pass on the key messages about Information Access Points, are Community Connectors aware of where they can obtain more if they run out?
- Do those trained as Community Connectors know how to let others know about future training if others want to do the training?
- Some Community Connectors may find the training useful for their CV, personal statement for university or just for personal development. It is good to value the stories of those who find it is useful for themselves or others to have done the training. If someone has a good news story, is there a method for feeding this back?

Step 12

Plan and implement monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation in Community Connector Programmes and How to Get Started

Evaluation is a critical component of a Community Connector programme. It helps you understand the impact of your efforts, what works, and areas for improvement. It's not just about collecting data, but about measuring the success of your programme in increasing access to support and resources, fostering community connections and enhancing wellbeing. Given the light-touch approach of the Connector programme, it's natural to question the need for monitoring and evaluation. However, these processes are vital. While the Connector programme thrives on community support and word-of-mouth, systematic monitoring and evaluation provide the structure needed to assess and enhance its efficacy.

Setting up an evaluation framework for your community can be as simple and straightforward as you want to make it. You don't need to drown in data. It's about pinpointing what's crucial for your programme's success. To get started, ask yourself questions like:

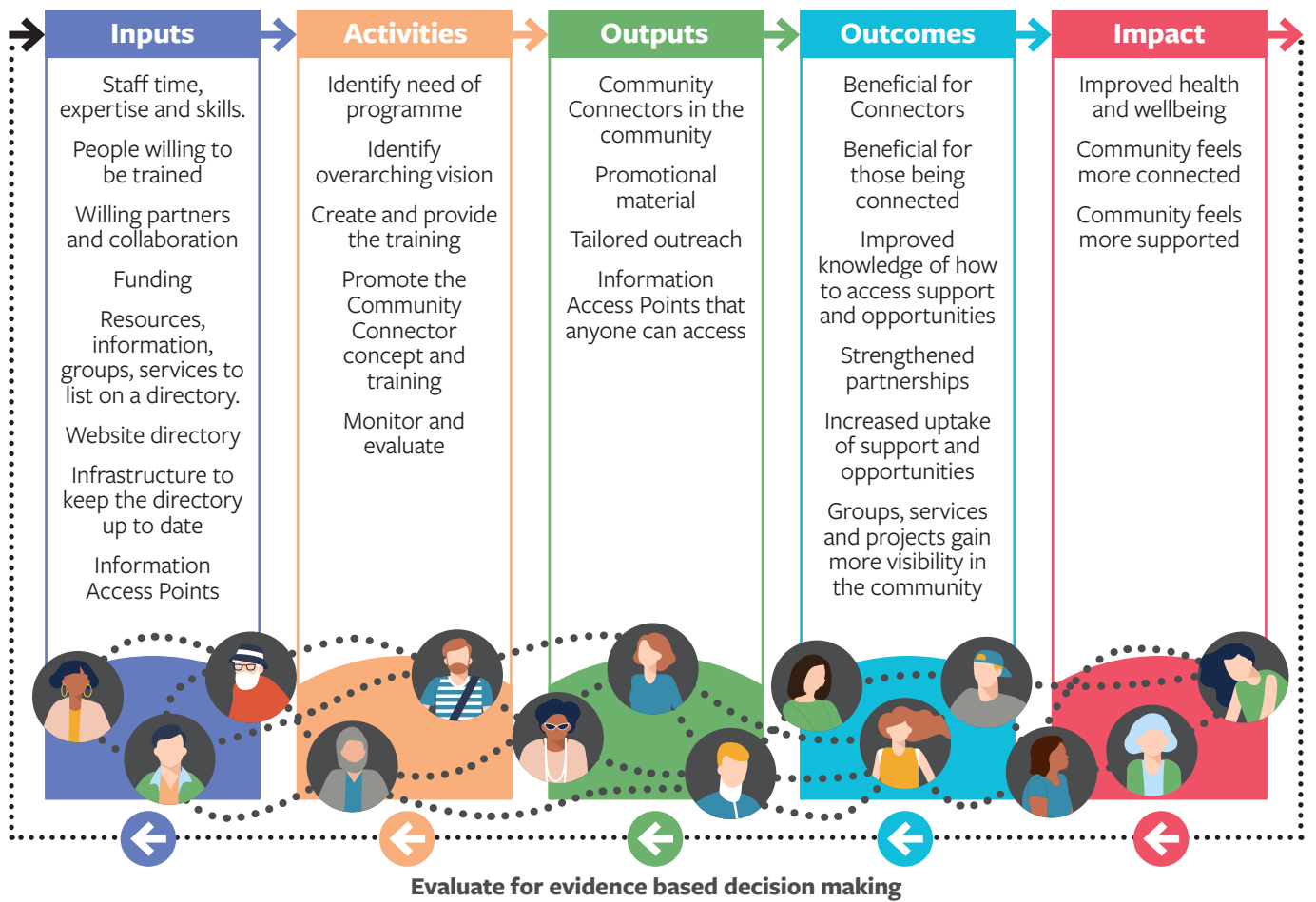
- What are our key goals? What is important to us?
- What matters to our community and our Community Connectors?
- What is important for the participants doing training? What do we really want to make sure participants learn? And the community to know about?
- What outcomes are most critical for the success of our program?

Once you have identified what really matters, then the next question is simply, 'How can we best measure this?' Focus on a few vital indicators that show the programme's impact. This approach makes evaluation manageable and meaningful. It's not about collecting lots of data, but about gathering the right information to demonstrate your programme's effectiveness and guide improvements.

Step 12: Build in monitoring and evaluation

Some people use logic charts to articulate what resources they have available for the programme, what activities they are going to focus on, and to name what impacts are important to them and for the community. An Evaluation and Monitoring Framework then helps you fill in the middle – what do we think we will see happening as a result of the programme (outputs) and what do we think we can measure to show that our programme is doing what we think it will (outcomes).

Community Connectors Logic Model



Setting Up a Formal Evaluation Framework

Formal evaluation frameworks can help in putting everything down on paper, ensuring there is clarity about what's important, there are consistent systems of measurement in place, and there are resources to make sure the data is collected, maintained and utilised. Even if your programme may not have a lot of budget to start with, it can still be worthwhile doing evaluation. If budgets for evaluation are tight, emphasising output measurement allows for the quantification of tangible results achieved through programme activities. This pragmatic choice ensures that the evaluation process remains proportional to available resources while still providing valuable insights into programme's effectiveness.

There are some simple steps you can work through to simply and effectively set up a formal evaluation framework for your programme. While these aren't exhaustive, they will give you a solid starting point as you get your programme up and running. Documenting each of these components, helps you to formalise an evaluation plan. And then you can add in some of the activity, output and outcome data, which will then form a large part of an evaluation report for the programme.

1. Deciding what matters locally
2. Choosing what and how to measure
3. Gathering data
4. Analysing data
5. Using the data

Remember, the goal of evaluation is not just to prove the effectiveness of the programme, but to continuously improve and adapt to your community's evolving needs. Keep the process simple, practical, and focused on what matters most to your community.

What are Some Easy Things to Measure?

Effective evaluation in Community Connector programmes relies on selecting the right metrics. Here are some examples of things you might want to evaluate, but don't feel pressure to measure everything – make sure you are careful to measure what's important and what you have the tools and resources to measure:

Step 12: Build in monitoring and evaluation

These are just examples of core metrics that could offer a practical framework for evaluating the impact of Community Connector programmes. By focusing on areas like these, you can gain a comprehensive understanding of your programme's reach and effectiveness, ensuring that it continues to meet the needs and expectations of your community.

Outreach and Engagement:

Measuring outreach helps you understand how effectively you're reaching and involving the community. It shows the spread and impact of your promotional activities and the inclusivity of your engagement efforts.

Example list of metrics

Outreach Totals:

- a) Community Promotion
 - Where (venue and postcode), when, who, total hours
 - Type of promotion eg conversation, poster, leaflet, talk at group etc.
- b) Press Radio
 - Where, when, what, reach
- c) Social Media
 - Where, when, what, reach

Training and Education:

Tracking training sessions and feedback is key to assessing the effectiveness of educational efforts, understanding participant satisfaction, and identifying areas for improvement in content and delivery.

Example list of metrics

Training Sessions:

- a) Number of Sessions
 - By type, date, venue, postcode, method
- b) Total People Trained
- c) Training Session Feedback might include:
 - Basic demographic of participant
 - Reason for doing the training
 - Knowledge of Information Access Points
 - Knowledge of amount of support and opportunities that can be accessed from Information Access Points
 - Confidence to signpost to Information Access Points
 - Satisfaction in training session
 - Feeling of sense of purpose
 - Readiness to be a Community Connector
 - Permission to take photo, sign up to newsletter, (consider GDPR).

Step 12: Build in monitoring and evaluation

3-6 Month Follow-up:

- a) Feedback from Community Connectors might include:
- Number of people signposted to Information Access Points
 - Feel more connected to community
 - Feel more connected to others
 - Feel a sense of doing something good. Sense of purpose.
 - Has led on to other things eg using it for CV, leading to other volunteering opportunities, good for university application, met new friends etc
- b) Feedback from those connected (difficult to track) might include:
- Feel more connected to community
 - Feel more connected to others
 - Learnt about support and opportunities via the info access points
 - Accessed support and/or opportunities via the info access points
 - Resulting change due to above

Community Impact:

Evaluating community feedback and changes in awareness can reveal the influence of your programme on the community's knowledge of how to access support, increased visibility of resources in the community, sense of connectedness and strengthened partnerships.

Evaluating impact of wider Connector involvement (eg newsletters and Connector meetups) can show whether these are effective in building connections and sense of being part of the programme.

Example list of metrics

- a) Wider Connector involvement:
- Community Connector newsletter distribution
 - Community Connector meetups (number, participants)
 - Spreading the word about the training
- b) Community spread of training:
- Train-the-Trainer Effectiveness
- c) Community feedback:
- Community member feedback
 - Community group feedback

Step 12: Build in monitoring and evaluation

Engagement in Information Access Points:

Monitoring Information Access Points allows you to gauge use, interest and engagement, helping refine your strategy to better connect with your audience and adapt any part of the programme.

Example list of metrics

a) Information Access Point Engagement:

- Web Analytics: Track website directory visits, bounce rates, and user engagement.
- Visitor/user numbers of the other Information Access Points: eg Phone Line, Talking Café and Talking Bench)

Health and Wellbeing:

Measuring changes in community health and wellbeing can provide insights into the impact of your programme, highlighting its effectiveness in improving lives. However, it is more difficult to directly attribute this to your programme.

Example list of metrics

a) Community survey analysis:

- Implement periodic surveys to assess the community's health and wellbeing eg ONS4
- Implement sense of connectedness survey.
- Focus on changes over time to gauge the programme's impact.

b) Interviews and Stories:

- Collect personal stories and interviews that illustrate the programme's impact on individuals' lives.

c) Local Health Data:

- Analysing local health data like how often people are using health services can provide valuable insights into the health trends and needs of the community. This data can help assess the broader health outcomes potentially influenced by your programme, but sometimes can be harder to get.

Influence on the system:

Evaluating the programme's influence on your local system or wider systems is important in demonstrating the impact of your work.

Programme management, cost effectiveness, staff satisfaction:

Monitoring the cost of the programme and staff feedback and job satisfaction is important in demonstrating value for money and also useful for continuous improvement of the programme.

Step 13

Celebrate and recognise achievements

Celebration and recognition create and build pride, motivation, a sense of belonging, a feeling of making an impact and a shared sense of accomplishment. Celebration needs to be done in a way that feels right for those involved and can take many forms.

- Identify moments during development of the programme to acknowledge and recognise milestones, moments of achievements or individual successes that contribute to the collective whole of creating and running the programme.
- For those who have trained as Community Connectors recognition in the form of certificates can be considered as well as regular updates for Community Connectors via newsletters or facebook page.
- Regular meet ups may be a way to celebrate the work of the Community Connectors and help them feel motivated and part of a bigger whole.
- How do you celebrate and recognise individuals' stories as Community Connectors and those who have been connected to those who have been trained?
- Consider public acknowledgement of case studies and statistics of the programme through community meetings, newsletters, local media and social media. This may also inspire others to come forwards to train as Community Connectors.
- Remember to ask everyone involved in the programme how they would like to celebrate, and their work be recognised.

Conclusion

At its heart Community Connector training is very simple. It works on many levels.

It is an enabler to help organisations work together to decide on the key messages in the training; this may involve building or enhancing access points. In itself just this partnership working and building clear places where people can find out about information and opportunities is a huge benefit to any community.

Trained Community Connectors create a network of people who benefit from knowing they are making a difference. Those who are connected to support and opportunities might go on to improve their health and wellbeing.

A Community Connector programme therefore goes beyond the immediate dissemination of information; it's about fostering a sense of empowerment, belonging, and mutual support within the community.

Imagine the impact if everyone in the community knew about the available support and opportunities.

As individuals become aware of support and opportunities, they not only enhance their own wellbeing but also contribute to the overall resilience and vitality of the community. Community Connectors help build a more inclusive, informed and supported community.

Such a simple idea yet with a big impact.

Case Study

Community Connectors, Health Connections Mendip, Frome, Somerset



Community Connectors Mendip, Somerset

Background

Over 2,206 Community Connectors have now been trained. Based on twenty conversations a year that is 44,120 signposting conversations a year happening in the community. The Connector work has become a core part of Health Connections offer.

In 2013, Frome Medical Practice employed a team member with a background in community development to connect the GP practices in Mendip (practice population of 118,000) to ways they could support their community by linking them into health and wellbeing support and opportunities. This was the first time the medical practice had employed someone to do community development work.

As the only person in the GP practice working on this, it was essential to understand what was needed and what could be done by just one person. The project was called Health Connections Mendip.

Needs Assessment

The first task was to find out if there was a pre-existing website directory where people in the community and staff in the GP practices could find out about local support and opportunities. Six organisations with website directories were invited to collaborate to see if they could work together. Some directories covered a large area and others covered specific topics eg dementia. Most directories had the challenge of keeping their directories up to date. At the meeting it was decided that it was best for the new worker based at Frome Medical Practice to set up and update a new directory that would cover the Mendip area.

At the same time, community members were expressing an interest in getting involved in some way. The main request was to get more involved in supporting each other to find out what was available locally to help people improve their health and wellbeing, and most importantly, to feel connected. Several training courses were offered to these people and feedback from them was gained. Existing training such as the RSPH Health Champion was provided to those who wanted to but was considered too long, Make Every Contact Count training too focused on nudges towards healthy lifestyles and Dementia Friends was more geared to upskilling the person trained rather than passing on messages. As a small project of just one worker, Health Connections did not have the funding nor infrastructure to take on formal volunteers. Inspired by Dementia Friends and work she had done in Brent with Street Connectors; the worker created the 'Community Connector' training alongside community members.

Creating Information Access Points

The Health Connections worker had to start from scratch and map all the groups, services, opportunities and resources in Mendip. This was a practice population of 118,000 and 12 GP practices. The area included medium sized towns such as Glastonbury, Wells, Shepton Mallet and Frome through to small villages such as Coleford. Much of this work included walking the streets, chatting to people, looking at notice boards, attending groups and at the same time creating networks, noting potential gaps in provision and general networking and detective work.

Two community members helped with this mapping. One did internet research and the other helped with gathering the information from the community. The decision was made to only include national organisations that really provided a service to the area and to make sure that the hyper local groups and services were included. The directory was reduced down from thousands of entries, to make sure that there was not information overload. The Health Connection's worker heard that many groups and services did not want to input their information themselves but were happy that the Health Connections worker added their information. This meant that information could be added and updated by just one person who had their ear to the ground and, over time, became the go-to-person for people who wanted to add new information. The GP practices also now had a team member who they could signpost people to if they wanted support in setting up, for example, a condition specific peer support group.

The next challenge was how people would be able to access the new website directory, if they preferred not to go online or were digitally excluded. The idea of the Talking Café came from a community member who said he wanted to go to a group that was for anyone and everyone - a place to make friends and also find out about support. In 2013 the first Talking Café was set up by the Health Connections worker in Frome and from there Talking Cafes have been set up across Mendip and then the rest of Somerset by different organisations.

The website directory and the Talking Café were called Information Access Points from where people could find out about all the support in their area. A front-door to information and support.

To spread awareness about the website and Talking Café, various publicity methods were employed, including posters, social media, newspaper articles, and radio interviews. To build on this, those people who had previously requested to get involved went on to become the first Community Connectors.

In 2015 the GP practices in Mendip decided to build the team and each GP practice then had access to a Health Connections team member. At this time a central phone line was set up which has since become one of the Information Access Points.

During the Covid pandemic a further 'Information Access Point' was set up as the Talking Cafes were closed. There was a need to be in the community and to be seen where people were. So Talking Benches were set up which are simply benches chosen in places with high footfall with a staff member who has access to the website directory and is just also there to say hello and connect with people. An anchor point in the community.

Funding of the Community Connector programme

The Community Connector training was initially funded by the innovative and politically independent Frome Town Council at £10,000 a year for three years. The District Council then gave staff time to the work for a short period and then a charity funded the work. Spark Somerset also provided the training to another area of Somerset.

The work is currently part funded by the Social Prescribing Link Worker contract that the GP practices hold for the Mendip area with the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

As part of the whole community approach to social prescribing, Community Connectors are seen as 'phase two' of social prescribing ie not included in part of the core offer of social prescribing until areas realise the importance of having a whole community approach and everyone having the opportunity to be part of the solution.

"Frome Town Council is committed to supporting the local community to be resilient and interconnected, and as such, financial support towards the Community Connectors training has enabled many people to become connectors in the place they live, to effectively and meaningfully signpost people to support services and organisations that enhance lives and wellbeing."

*Paul Wynne,
Town Clerk Frome Town Council*

Staffing

The funding for the Community Connector programme in Mendip is currently supported by a two day a week post – this person covers the whole of Mendip. The paid staff member provides the training to the community, updates the training with feedback from participants, promotes the training and then also trains other team members to provide the training sessions. Other team members support the work by training people opportunistically or if the Community Connector is not available. It is a team effort. It has been essential to get the right person in the role it has been key to employ someone who has skills in training, community development and strong administrative skills.

Chloe Forfitt, a Community Connector Trainer for around six months, reflects on her role: “The role itself may seem solitary on paper but is anything but in practice. You are out in the community every day, meeting people from all walks of life. The stories people tell you when you start to talk about health and wellbeing can range from heart-warming to heart-breaking.”

Speaking about the training, Chloe notes, “The Community Connector training is well-developed, easy to understand, and straightforward to deliver as a trainer.”

She acknowledges the importance of confidence and the ability to approach people when delivering training: “However, a trainer needs the necessary confidence to deliver the training and the ability to approach people they don’t know when visiting various businesses, shops and other organisations.”

Despite initial nervousness in delivering training to large groups, Chloe found reassurance in the genuine interest of participants: “Learning alongside another trainer and delivering it to a group I knew well immediately assured me that this was training people really wanted, dispelling my nervousness.”

Reflecting on her experience, Chloe shares, “I have learned a lot about the incredible abundance of groups and resources available in our part of the county. I love that the training enhances the visibility and sustainability of groups and services.” She highlights the importance of various skills for the trainer role: “It is important to have a real variety of skills for the trainer role. There are necessary admin and IT skills as there is entry across various online systems. Time management is crucial for doing the job well. However, the biggest asset is flexibility, as you never know who you are going to meet and the approach that might be required. Obviously, being jolly and friendly helps!”

See the Community Connectors video on the [Health Connections website](#).



**Chloe Forfitt,
Community
Connector Trainer
2023**

Creating the training

The training is continuously being improved. For example we used to introduce the wider determinants to health, and we now use the building blocks to health and wellbeing. We noticed that some people thought they should signpost to particular groups and services so we reinforced the message in the training that Community Connectors only signpost to Information Access Points.

Delivering the training

The Community Connector training is offered out to organisations in the community and can be booked by the participating organisation. These usually take place in the participants venue eg voluntary organisations, shops, businesses, places of worship, peer support groups, schools and to individuals in public venues.

Regular sessions are also held in public venues and open to anyone with booking via an online booking website.

A condensed version of the training is available to those who have less time, and to individuals who may want a shorter one-to-one session.

Smaller community groups often prefer a large A3 presentation ring bound folder which can be more friendly than a powerpoint.

An opportunistic version of the training is also done via prompts on a postcard, so people can just get the key messages for themselves and perhaps be inspired to pass it on to others.

During the training sessions we found that the trainer always had to play the part of the Community Connector in the role play in order to show the difference between working within the remit of the Community Connector and not.

Elearning was created but it needs to be improved.

Some participants fed back that the word 'training' put them off and they preferred the term 'workshop' or 'session'.

Key to delivering the training is flexibility and getting ideas from the community. After training a room full of teachers, the Health and Wellbeing teacher suggested the idea of presenting the training to pupils at the school who were wellbeing champions. The pupils then went on, that afternoon, to co-facilitate a training session for their parents! It was great to see pupils teaching their parents.

Another example of remaining flexible was a training session where there was not the promised technology for powerpoint nor the promised print outs of the training. The trainers had to remember the training and do the one-hour session from memory.


Health Connections Mendip has embedded the Connector training as part of their offer to those who use their service - this works in a number of ways. It might be that some people want to train as a Community Connector after they worked with a Health Connector (this can be as part of a group training session or just as part of their appointment with the Health Connector) or it can be offered to someone as an alternative to seeing a Health Connector one to one, if this is what the person wants. It is useful to have one member of each Primary Care Network area to be the key 'connector' team member, they are the staff members who are keen on the connector work and want to champion it and provide the training when necessary.

Community Connector training is offered to new staff of the medical practice as part of their induction.

Promotion of the training

The team use press releases, posters, Eventbrite and social media to promote the Connector training. Trained Connectors (community members) are also encouraged to pass on information about the training to others, if appropriate. However, the real way to reach people is to literally walk the streets, talk to people, go into shops, visit community groups, go to places of worship, chat to people on park benches. This needs the trainer to be a real people person and someone who is comfortable to strike up a conversation and explain the training and the benefits in a simple, concise way. This is the real key to the training and the programme.


It is essential to promote the training to those who would easily find out about the training but equally and perhaps more importantly, it is essential to go to where people are and bring the conversation and training to them.



HEALTH CONNECTIONS
Your GP practice social prescribing and health coaching team


Become a Community Connector

Become a Community Connector and signpost others to Information Access Points where they can find out about support, opportunities and resources that could help improve their health and wellbeing.



Give us a call or scan the QR code to find out about our one hour training sessions. Or book a time for us to come to your group or organisation.

Give us a call, we'll be happy to help
Call: 01373 468368
Visit: www.healthconnections-mendip.org



Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is being built in as the programme evolves. The information is recorded regularly on excel. Things that are now monitored include:

- Outreach - where, who, how long and when on an excel.
- Publicity - number and location of posters in the community, number and reach of social media and press articles. All of these promote not just the training but where people can access support.
- Training - number of training sessions including type of training, venue, town and number of people trained.
- The main evaluation that is done is the evaluation of the training itself. Initially there was a pre and post training questionnaire but it was too much for people to fill in. Feedback from participants was that they wanted to just do a questionnaire after the training so this is what is now done. Initially the only option was to fill in an online survey but feedback was that some people didn't want to fill it in or didn't have the time. Currently those who have done the training have three options – to fill in the online survey, to fill in a paper version or to fill it in with the trainer. As always it is key to provide different ways for different people to give feedback in ways that suits them.
- Number of people attending/using Information Access Points (although this can't be directly attributed to the Community Connectors).
- Case studies and feedback – these demonstrate lots of unforeseen consequences as well as those predicted.

In the first year people who had trained were asked to fill in sheets with the number of people they had signposted to the Information Access Points. Some people enjoyed filling in the sheets and dropping them off at the Talking Cafes, other people emailed the information, other people didn't want to do anything after they had done the training. The average number of people who had been signposted over the first year was 20 people.

Over 2,206 Community Connectors have now been trained. Based on twenty conversations a year that is 44,120 conversations a year happening between community members and signposting to support and opportunities. The Connector work has become a core part of Health Connections offer.

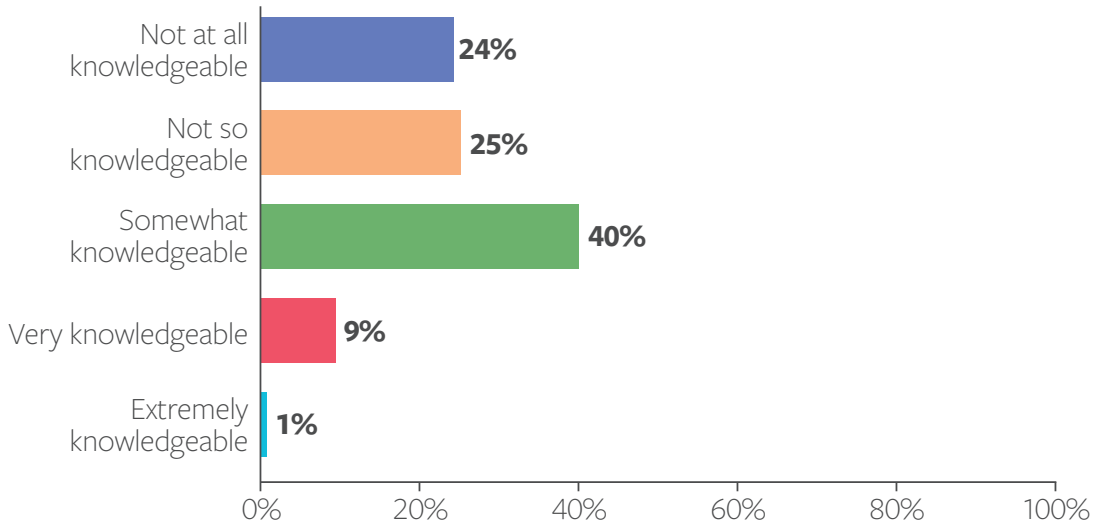
The learning for other areas is that it is hugely important to build in appropriate and proportional monitoring and evaluation from the start.

Case Study | Health Connections Mendip

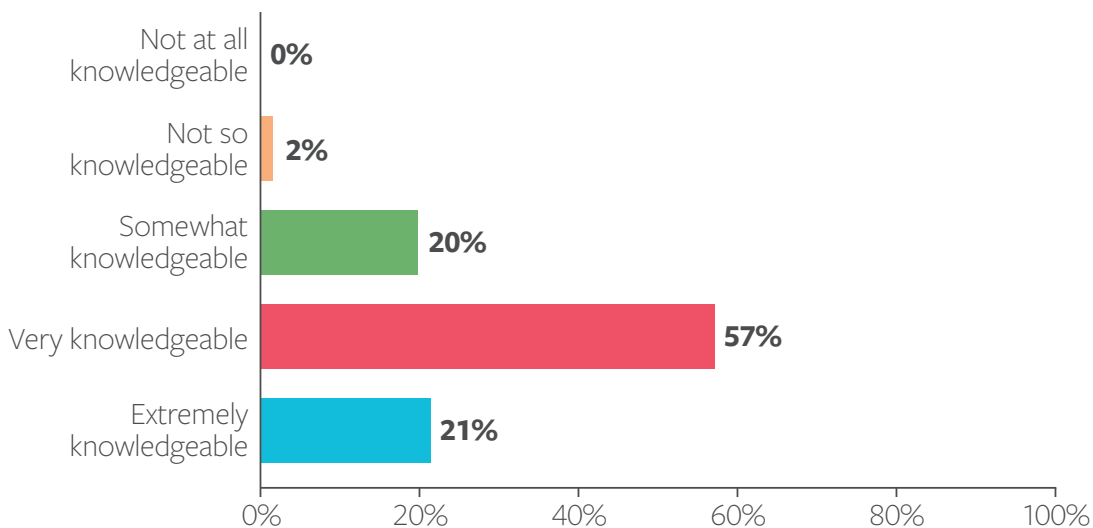
The questions asked after people have been trained:

Q1. Connector training is designed for those who live and work in Mendip. Please let us know your nearest town

Q2. Before you completed this training, how knowledgeable did you feel about support, resources and opportunities, in your community, to help improve health and wellbeing?

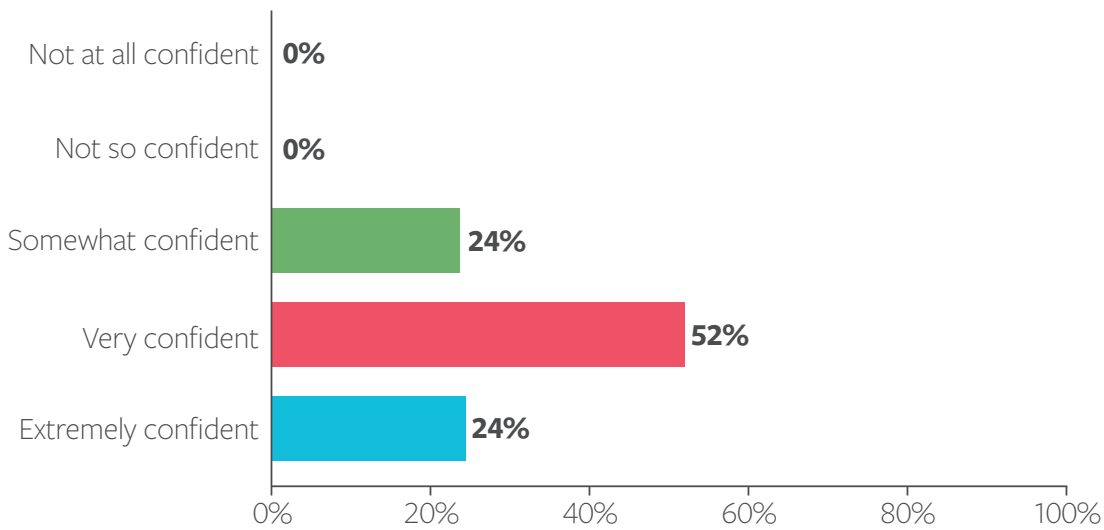


Q3. Now you have completed this training, how knowledgeable do you feel about how to access support, resources and opportunities, in your community, to help improve health and wellbeing?

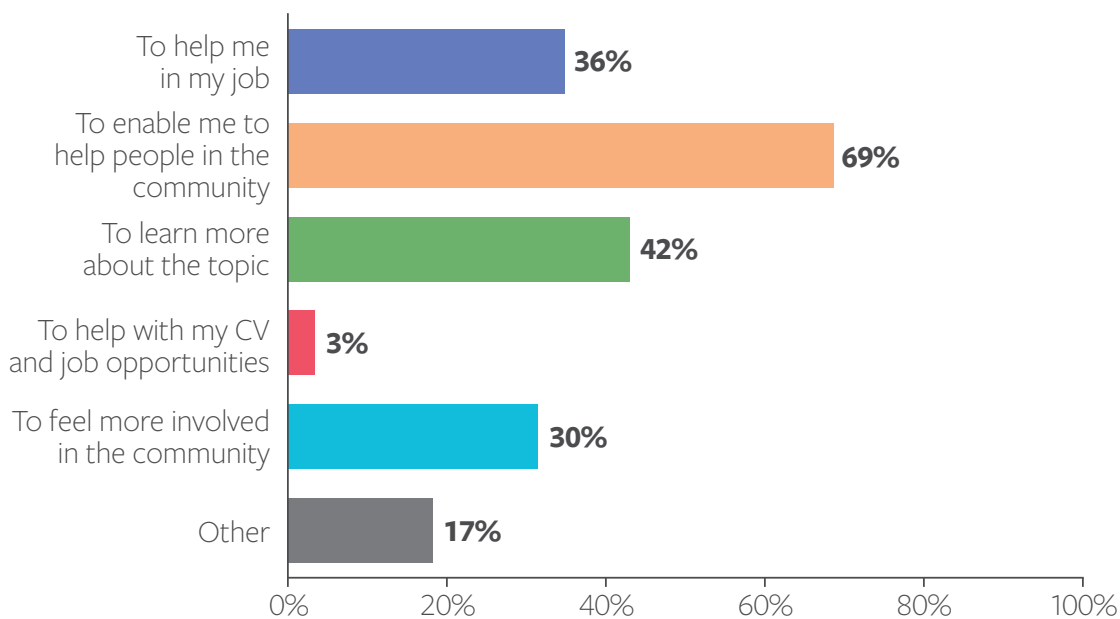


Case Study | Health Connections Mendip

Q4. Now you have completed this training, how confident do you feel to signpost people to Information Access Points?



Q5. What was your reason for doing this training?



Q6. How satisfied were you with your training experience?

Q7. Do you have any suggestions to improve training?

Q8. Is there anything you particularly enjoyed? (Please give details).

Q9. Would you willing to be contacted in future to find out about your experiences as a Community Connector and receive relevant information relating to Community Connectors e.g. quarterly newsletter. This is really valuable for our service development. If so please add your name and email address below:

Q10. Do you give us permission to use the photo we took today in social media, presentations, press and any other related way to promote the work?

Feedback

"I left my teaching job of 25 years last July; in order to help care for a young family member and to explore new career and volunteering opportunities. The Community Connector training jumped out to me as a lot of my role in education had become about supporting families and reaching out to different organisations to help meet a range of needs. The Community Connector training was really helpful in showing how anyone can connect people to support in a positive way; whatever your job or circumstances.

"Chatting through the idea of community connecting with the trainer led me to contacting my local doctor's surgery to talk with their social prescriber and see how that role might work as a career. I then registered with the NHS jobs website, I was lucky enough in April to be offered the post of 'Carer peer support worker' as part of the Somerset Carers Assessment Service. The Community Connector training not only opened my eyes to the idea of community connection, but opened the door to a new and unexpected career!"

Sallie Boyd, Carers Peer Support Worker.



Feedback

"The training was just what I needed. It helps me have conversations where I can just signpost to access points rather than trying to remember times, dates and venues of all the support that is in our community."

Caroline Blake, community café owner.



Feedback

After attending the initial Community Connector training with my colleagues at Oakfield Academy, it struck me that both the wealth of resources available and the ease at which they could be accessed, would be something that might be of interest to the pupils and their parents too. Part of my role is to work with pupil Wellbeing Ambassadors in our school and during the training, I had the idea that if they themselves attended the training they could, in turn, cofacilitate a session and train parents!

The children were excited to be part of a project that was 'real life' and could also benefit those in our immediate community. They really enjoyed the training and it was thrilling seeing them then go on to cofacilitate the training and pass on their knowledge to their parents. It was important for them to see that this gaining and sharing of information and ways to help people could ricochet and just keep going...It was a really great way to empower individuals and to be part of such a positive wellbeing project locally!

Ruth Stacey - KS2 & 3 teacher/Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health (DSL-MH), Oakfield Academy, Frome.



Feedback

"There is not a week that goes by where either myself or another member of our team doesn't signpost to the directory, phone line or the Talking Cafe and bench." Community Police Officer.



Connecting Materials

Initially postcard sized cards with information about the access points were used but the Connectors fed back that they were too large so business card sized cards were created. Now both are offered to those who are trained.


New postcards have been created which also spread the message without the need of a Community Connector (see right).

Celebration and keeping in touch

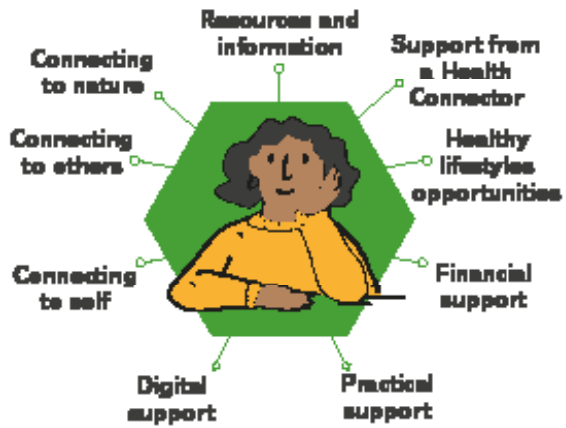
Initially a newsletter was sent out to those who had done the training. Community Connectors were also invited to drop into Talking Cafes to catch up. However, feedback has been that the newsletter needs to be targeted specifically to the Community Connectors with information about new groups and services but reiterating the message that the role of the Community Connector is only to signpost to Information Access Points. Also feedback has been that Community Connectors would like a specific get together to meet with others who have trained.

Expanding the Connector role

The work has expanded to include [Green Community Connector](#) training and Digital Community Connector training. Other Connector training that has been developed in Frome includes: What Matters to Me Connectors, Planning Ahead Connectors, 5 Ways to Wellbeing Connectors to name but a few. Frome Medical Practice has also worked with Historic England to implement Heritage Connectors. The messages are different, but the format is the same – simple training which empowers people to pass on simple messages that may have a big impact.



There are lots of things that can help with your health and wellbeing, for example:



Find out more by visiting a Health Connections Information Access Point



Information Access Points

Find out about support, resources and opportunities to improve your health and wellbeing, in a way that suits you.

Visit a Talking Cafe:
Mondays 10–11.30am Cheese and Grain Cafe
Thursdays 1–2.30pm Coffee#1 Westway, Frome

Pass by a Talking Bench:
Fridays 11.30–12.00 noon outside Frome Library

Visit the website directory:
www.healthconnectionsfrome.org

Call: 01373 468368

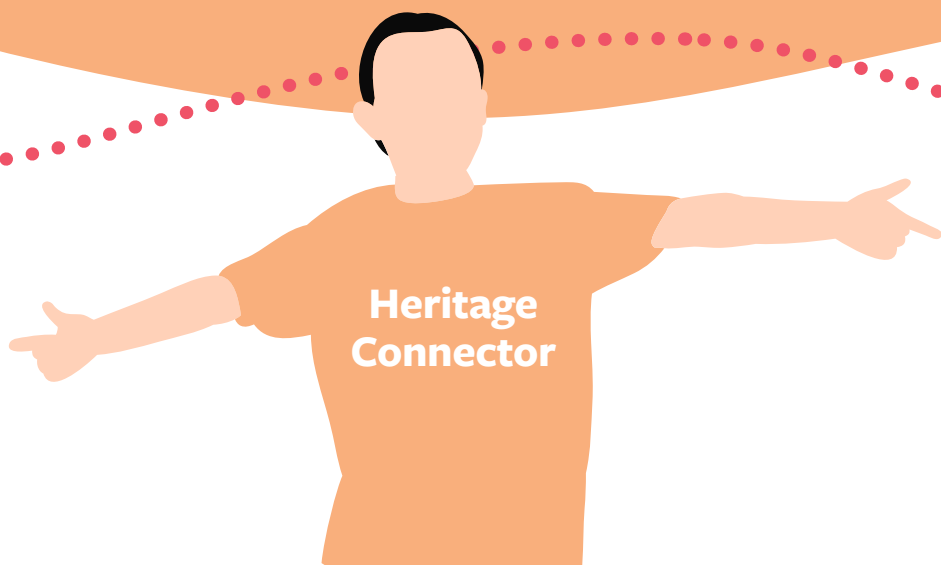


Information correct as of spring 2024

Section 2

Topic Based Connectors

These connectors pass on information about the benefits of a particular topic and/or how to access them in their community.



What are Topic Based Connectors?

Topic Based Connectors pass on information about the benefits of a particular topic and/or how to access them in their community. Anyone and everyone can be a Topic Based Connector. There is no need to already know about the topic.

An example of 5 Ways to Wellbeing Connectors. The training could include Connectors working through the 5 Ways to Wellbeing. The simple message they pass on to others may be signposting them to a website or giving them a postcard with information about 5 Ways to Wellbeing and also signposting people back onto the 5 Ways to Wellbeing Connector training.

A further example might be Pain Management Connectors. The Pain Management Connectors would learn about the prevalence and consequences of chronic pain and the tools to self-manage. The simple messages they share could be, for example, visit the website for information on Live Well with Pain resources, pop along to a Pain Cafe or sign up for a Pain Self-Management programme.

Nature Connectors might learn about the benefits of connecting to nature and the local resources and opportunities. The simple messages they may pass on could be - visit a website directory to find out about local opportunities to get connected to nature or drop into the local Nature Connections Cafe in the park.

Green Connectors could learn about the link between what is good for us, is good for the planet. They could also discover local opportunities for getting involved in green activities. The simple message might be signposting to a green website directory and/or a leaflet that explains the link between individual, community and planetary health and wellbeing,

Carers' Connectors learn about the importance of carers and the impact caring may have on people. They would learn about the importance of carers having access to information and support. The simple messages they share might be to look at the local carers' support website, visit a Carers' Cafe or get support from the local carers' service.

In this section we look in more depth at a case study of Heritage Connectors

Case Study

Heritage Connector Pilot

Desi Gradinarova

Background

Objective: The Heritage Connectors pilot project aimed to adapt Frome's successful Community Connector model to the heritage sector. Following the publication of their Wellbeing and Heritage Strategy in May 2022, Historic England were keen to demonstrate the wellbeing benefits of engaging with heritage and explore ways to connect the heritage activities available locally to social prescribing. National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP) aimed to use Frome's Community Connector model as part of its work exploring how the whole community can work with social prescribing services to promote health and wellbeing.

Partners: The idea of Heritage Connectors resulted from a partnership between Historic England and the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), in collaboration with Health Connections Mendip, the social prescribing service of Frome Medical Practice.

Duration: The project ran from November 2022 to October 2023, with a two-month extension to ensure comprehensive evaluation and implementation.

Evaluation: The project was evaluated externally by Wavehill Ltd, and [the evaluation report](#) is available separately.

Funding: The pilot was funded by Historic England

Project team: The project management and frontline delivery was undertaken by Frome Medical Practice and their Health Connections social prescribing team. Frome Heritage CIC provided the project coordinator, local historian David Lassman. Frome Heritage CIC already had good relationship with many of the other important stakeholders for Heritage Connectors project, such as Frome Town Council, Frome Heritage Museum, Frome Guided Walks, the Frome Society for Local Study and the Frome Family History Group. Project support and guidance was provided by Desi Gradinarova from NASP and Historic England.

The aim of the project

There is [growing evidence](#) for the wellbeing benefits of engaging with heritage and the historic environment. As [demonstrated by Historic England](#) and others, there are many ways to improve individual and community wellbeing through heritage - from volunteering and visiting sites, to sharing stories and memories of a place and connecting with others.

Historic England's [Heritage and Social Prescribing evidence report](#) highlights some of the main benefits of engaging with heritage and the historic environment:

- Strengthened feelings of identity, purpose and belonging, which help alleviate loneliness
- Supporting good brain health and memory functions
- Learning from the past provides insight, resilience and inspiration for the future
- Revealing the historic significance of a place helps understand it and connect with it better, promoting pride of place
- Heritage shows us that we are part of something bigger – it is inseparable part of us and our own legacy in this time and place.

The aims of the Heritage Connector project were twofold:

- 1) To increase knowledge of the wellbeing benefits of heritage to the local social prescribing service, to other key stakeholders and to community members.
- 2) To help people find out about available local heritage wellbeing activities by training community members as Heritage Connectors.

Co-creation of the Heritage Connector Programme – what needs to be in place to establish the scheme

Mapping heritage activities

Frome has a lot to offer in terms of local heritage provision. There was already a strong network of heritage organisations and activities in the town, which local people engaged well with. These ranged from history lectures, walks and talks, delivered by local community and voluntary organisations, through Memory Cafes and performances of plays based on historical research, to the first Frome Local History Festival, which took place in May 2023. Discover Frome had also already created a directory of some of these activities.

Bringing partners together

Through a series of roundtables and meetings, local partners were drawn to the Heritage Connectors project initial partners' meeting, including Frome's parish church, Home in Frome, Frome Museum, Frome Heritage CIC, Frome Library, Frome Community Education and Discover Frome.

The initial project partners' meeting identified enablers and issues that needed to be addressed. Some could be addressed within the project and others were wider issues.

The first issue was to discuss the idea in general. Several issues were identified:

a) Lack of awareness about the wellbeing potential of engagement with heritage.

Despite the wide range of heritage activities on offer in Frome and the relatively high level of community engagement it was noted that many people could not see the connection between heritage and wellbeing. This demonstrated the need to support heritage and VCSE organisations locally to promote the positive effects of their offers. The Heritage Connectors project team encouraged the partners and stakeholders to add at least a sentence or two on their website pages, highlighting the wellbeing benefits of their activities (for example, taking part in heritage walks helps to keep you active, connect with others and get inspired about the place you live in).

b) Language and terminology

For some partners and stakeholders, linking heritage with health and social prescribing risked possible medicalisation of engagement with heritage and the historic environment. They felt that this could be quite off-putting to many who did not consider themselves unwell. Discussions took place about the definition and use of the terms 'heritage', 'wellbeing' and 'social prescribing'.

A way to address this is to provide an explanation (and examples) for the multiple levels of need that a wellbeing (and social prescribing) activity can help with – from prevention to more in depth support. It is also useful to use terms that are known and familiar to the community. For example, in Frome they have had a GP based social prescribing service since 2013 but they are only now beginning to introduce the term 'social prescribing' – it is being used more in other areas and in the press. The term 'heritage' may have negative connotations and can create barriers to engagement, and this is a wider issue that was discussed in the meeting.

If specific terms are going to be used in a project, preparatory work and targeted public engagement around the meaning, use and understanding of the specific terms, can significantly improve the levels of understanding, interest and uptake of projects

Heritage Connectors

c) Access

Access to heritage sites and activities can be problematic both physically (in terms of unavailable transport to sites, or physical barriers for people with disabilities in many old buildings or archaeological sites) and financially (high prices for tickets to enter sites). There are also psychological barriers that many heritage sites present to groups and individuals that simply do not feel welcome there (many ethnic or social groups don't feel welcome or represented historically in these places and are put off by difficult histories and/or contested heritage issues). Again, these are problems that the heritage sector generally needs to address. However, they become even more prevalent when considered in health and wellbeing context. This is yet another reason to put widening participation and addressing inequalities at the heart of any community work and social prescribing initiatives. Early engagement with local communities and groups with specific needs, to establish how access can be managed for them in a suitable manner, is a crucial element of setting up this scheme.

NHS guidance for services to be included on a social prescribing directory can be found [here](#) (Annex 3A P.23) and help address some of the access issues that were brought up in the meeting.

Deciding on Access Points

The Frome Connector model recommends having three Information Access Points, which the trained Heritage Connectors signpost people to. These are usually an online directory, a telephone line and a person that you can speak to, covering all different ways that people may find useful and appropriate to locate social prescribing services or wellbeing activities.

During the stakeholder meeting it was agreed that the online directory which the Heritage Connectors would signpost to would be the Discover Frome directory as it already gave information on available heritage activities locally – it was decided to add an enhanced focus on those that can benefit people's wellbeing. Another reason behind selecting Discover Frome as the host of the general heritage and wellbeing online directory was that the traffic to its website was greater than any other heritage directories in Frome. Discover

Frome also had a staff member who was able to keep it updated.

The Heritage Directory initially consisted of seventeen individual entries, with each one providing brief details about the organisation and the activities on offer. Later, the project team discussed the need to highlight the wellbeing benefits of the heritage activities and invited the partners to consider summarising the main benefits to include as part of their entry in the directory.

In addition, the social prescribing directory created by Health Connections Mendip included a new "Heritage Wellbeing" category - this was the first time that heritage had been included on the NHS social prescribing directory.

A telephone number is the second access point that people can use if they wish to find out information about local heritage wellbeing activities. This is particularly useful for people without access to the internet or for those who are not confident in using online resources. It was decided that the phone line that Heritage Connectors would signpost to was also provided by Discover Frome, because they had the capacity to staff a telephone line and have somebody to consult their online directory and provide information on the phone.

The third access point for the Heritage Connectors scheme is the physical space, where people can meet face-to-face, make friends and receive heritage information in person. As there wasn't a heritage drop in, the project established a 'Heritage Café'. It offered people a convenient local place where they could physically meet and find out more about their town's heritage and the available heritage wellbeing activities locally. One important consideration when choosing the physical access point for Heritage Connectors was access. The project team found that it was crucial to create a welcoming space with a minimal number of barriers to participation – and ideally with low or no cost of attending. Other factors such as noise and busyness are also useful to be mindful of. People are more comfortable when they can talk and listen to others easily and be in less crowded environment.

Heritage Connectors

Frequency of meetings is also important. The Heritage Café was held monthly for an hour, on the third Friday of each month, within a commercial café setting. What mattered was that people knew when and where the physical space was available and that these arrangements remained in place for as long as possible. In order to maximise accessibility, another issue to be considered is offering all “Heritage Connectors” materials in a variety of formats. Although web- and online-based materials are eco-friendlier and more efficient than printed ones, many people do not have access to computers or the internet, and so prefer to be given paper copies.

The project coordinator had several printed copies of the Heritage Connectors directory with him at the Heritage Café for people to take with them after the session. He also brought local history books, which served as possible talking points, or a visual aid that participants engaged with during the hourly session.

One additional benefit of the creation of the physical point of information was that it organically developed into an informal network and social club, where people met others with similar interests. The number of attendees at the Heritage Café ranged from six to around 15 – most of those who came to the café offered positive feedback and returned for subsequent sessions.

Recommendations and learnings from the initial stages of the Heritage Connectors project

There are elements which need to be in place locally before starting to develop a Heritage Connectors scheme. These elements are:

- The existence of several local heritage activities providers (ideally a network of heritage and VCSE partners keen to promote the public and wellbeing value of their sites and offers). You cannot signpost people to wellbeing heritage activities if those do not exist in the first place.
- A level of understanding about the general wellbeing value of engaging with heritage both among the heritage activities providers and among local people. This is needed in order to make the case for the health and wellbeing benefits of those activities to anyone who may consider engaging with them, as well as to attract more people to sign up to the Heritage Connectors training. Public events, publicity campaigns or outreach initiatives in the preliminary phase of the project can help with this.
- Local heritage and VCSE organisations working towards widening access to their activities and wellbeing offers to support those who do not traditionally engage or visit to have a reason and a means to do that.

- A wide range of stakeholders need to co-design the project. The stakeholders should represent the different groups and needs of the community. The Frome pilot would have benefited from bringing in more stakeholders with the opportunity for a wider range of partners to contribute and participate in shaping the programme. Consider individuals who are traditionally not represented or engaged with local heritage and invite them to help co-develop ways to widen access. Regular stakeholder meetings and a longer project timeframe would help enable this.
- Convenient, accessible and welcoming Information Access Points need to be in place and agreed on with the stakeholders.

Developing these elements of the first (preliminary) stage of establishing Heritage Connectors scheme will create solid foundations for the programme and will provide buy-in from partners and the public.

Heritage Connectors Training – creation, promotion and outreach

The development of the ‘Heritage Connectors’ training was one of the main aims of this pilot scheme. The initial target was set for 30-50 Heritage Connectors to be trained during the project. In the end, the project team trained more than 70 Heritage Connectors within the active delivery phase (April to September 2023).

Heritage Connectors training – format and content

There are a variety of formats that can be utilised for the Heritage Connectors training sessions. Apart from online and in-person PowerPoint presentations, free discussions using printed materials (such as leaflets and cards) and one-to-one conversations, Heritage Connectors training can be included as part of other events (for example, within regular meetings of specific groups).

More informal versions of the training (delivered more opportunistically in cafes, park benches etc) could be very beneficial for reaching and engaging new groups. These could take anything between 10 minutes to an hour, depending on circumstances and interest. The trainings can be pre-organised and pre-booked or offered as a free drop-in session within other classes or events, or even just as ad hoc sessions when the opportunity arises.

In terms of content, the Heritage Connectors training was tested with some stakeholders. The session plan (see next page) outlines the one-hour session.

At the end of each session, the Heritage Connectors coordinator gave each of the trainees several postcards containing a reminder of the three key access points of information and the wellbeing benefits. Each participant of the training could keep some of these for themselves, but also pass them on to people they signpost in their new role of Heritage Connectors.

“Even if you’re already part of a heritage group we’re often going off of what we know in our little bubbles, signposting can help to plug any gaps in knowledge.”

Heritage Connectors Stakeholder

To find out about how to get involved in heritage in your community:



Visit the Heritage Directory
www.discoverfrome.co.uk



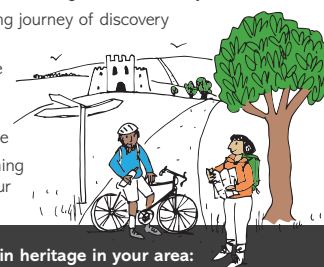
Come along to a Heritage Café



Call Discover Frome
01373 465757

Historic England highlights some of the main benefits of engaging with heritage and the historic environment:

- 1 Connection with heritage improves our feelings of identity and belonging and helps alleviate loneliness
- 2 Heritage activities promote good brain health and strengthen our memory
- 3 Exploring heritage and history offers an exciting journey of discovery
- 4 Learning from ours and others past provides insight, resilience and inspiration for the future
- 5 Revealing the past of a place and its historic significance helps us understand it and connect with it better, promoting pride of place
- 6 Heritage shows us that we are part of something bigger– it is and inseparable part of us and our own legacy in this time and place



There are lots of ways you can get involved in heritage in your area:

- Visit Discover Frome website: www.discoverfrome.co.uk
- Call Discover Frome: 01373 465757
- Come along to a Heritage Café: third Friday of every month, 11-12 noon, Cheese & Grain

Heritage Connector lesson plan

Introduction (5 minutes):

Welcome participants, housekeeping, outline objectives of the session.

1) Understanding Heritage and its Benefits (15 minutes):

- Discuss ideas of what heritage is and what it means to people
- Elicit examples of local heritage
- Discuss benefits of engaging with heritage
- Build on previous point by explaining Historic England's and other's findings that heritage: helps people connect to the places they live in and to the communities they are part of, strengthens feelings of belonging and identity, helps to alleviate loneliness and isolation and gives us bigger sense of meaning and purpose in life, alongside supporting brain health and developing practical skills and life-long learning.
- Discuss reasons why people may not engage with heritage opportunities

2) Heritage Connectors Project Overview (5 minutes):

- Brief outline of how Heritage Connectors fit into wider heritage and social prescribing in the area. This may include information on the SPLW service, heritage activities in the area and availability of Heritage Buddies etc. This will be different for different areas.
- Explain the aim of the project is to increase knowledge of the benefits of engaging with heritage and to increase access to information about heritage activities to more people by simple signposting to access points.

Continued

Step 7: Create the Community Connector Content

Heritage Connector lesson plan

3) Role and Responsibilities of Heritage Connectors (10 minutes):

- Explain Heritage Connectors only signpost and don't provide further support.
- Elicit why they think Heritage Connectors only signpost to the access points rather than to specific services or activities eg may give wrong time, group may have stopped, goes beyond the role of the Heritage Connector.
- Explain the three key signposting messages Heritage Connectors convey to people.
 - a) Online directory (Discover Frome) Show participants the online directory.
 - b) Phone line (Discover Frome)
 - c) Physical social space (Heritage Café Frome)

4) Ways of Keeping in Touch (5 minutes):

- Explain ways of keeping in touch, such as visiting the Heritage Café.

5) Evaluation and Conclusion (10 minutes):

- Stress the importance of evaluation and distribute evaluation forms or online survey links.
- Summarise key points discussed
- Distribute postcards to participants, emphasising their role as Heritage Connectors.
- Thank the participants!

Heritage Connectors

Training delivery

The main body of the Heritage Connectors training followed the example of the general Community Connector training session.

The Heritage Connectors training session usually took around 30-45 minutes, and normally comprised a Power Point presentation, delivered to a group of participants, followed by discussions and a question and answer session. The project coordinator led the sessions, which took place in rooms provided by either Frome City Council or Frome Medical Practice, as well as at the Heritage Café.

People came to the Heritage Connectors training session via a range of routes. For one of the participants at the Heritage Café training sessions, the informal and welcoming character of the setting had allowed her to overcome her anxiety and attend. Another participant, who reportedly experienced social isolation, attended as a result of a social prescribing signpost by a team member of Health Connections Mendip. There were people who had previously attended the local history course run by Frome Community Education since 2012, and who brought friends and family members with them to explore what Heritage Connectors was about.

“As a team we have definitely noticed [an increased knowledge about wellbeing effects of engaging in heritage]. We now know how to support it, some were a bit cynical about it to start with, but when we went along and saw how people can benefit from it and what is available it really changed our views about it.”

Stakeholder Interview

Promotion of the training sessions

The Heritage Connectors pilot and the training were promoted via a variety of communication channels. The start of the project was announced first in a news article in the local paper. Social media was also used – both by Health Connections and Discover Frome. They also distributed leaflets and postcards. The latter were left at various places around town during events, such as the Heritage Festival in Frome in May 2023.

It is useful to keep local communications and media partners informed and engaged throughout the delivery of the scheme, as they are often on the lookout for good stories and for opportunities to help people and communities find new ways to come together and support each other, especially when resources are scarce and wellbeing needs high.

The Heritage Connectors were representatives of a variety of walks in life – social prescribers, doctors, teachers, local authority staff and community group members. A challenge for the pilot was to successfully engage with non-traditional groups who did not have an existing interest in heritage and train them as Heritage Connectors. With more time, the pilot could have asked currently trained Heritage Connectors to support with promoting the training to all areas of the town. Also working with more partners would have increased the promotion of the training and local needs data would have been easier to access via these partners. Finally, using less formal venues and having time for more community outreach would have brought in a wider variety of people to the training.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an intrinsic part of any wellbeing project, as the way to capture the positive outcomes of this work and to demonstrate the benefits for the participants and the communities. Funders in any sector expect to see some data on wellbeing impact and social outcomes when considering a grant or a funding application.

There are a variety of tools and methods to evaluate the work on wellbeing and heritage projects. In the case of this pilot, we had the assistance of external evaluators, Wavehill Ltd, who developed the surveys, approaches and the overall evaluation framework for the pilot. This was funded by Historic England and embedded in the project design from the beginning.

The methodology was mixed and consisted of quantitative and qualitative data being collated before and after the end of the project. The quantitative data was drawn with the help of surveys which were undertaken by the trained Heritage Connectors on a voluntary basis.

In addition, Wavehill carried out deep dive interviews with a range of project partners and stakeholders, as well as with the project team members themselves and several focus groups of participants.

The Heritage Connectors project team gathered participant and stakeholder feedback separately as well, as part of their normal project assessment process. Overall, the [evaluation report's](#) findings showed that there was a definite increase in wider community's appreciation of the wellbeing potential and power of heritage, which led to further interest in continuing the scheme and utilising heritage more in social prescribing and wellbeing referral pathways.

The findings from a short nine-month project are only indicative of the potential of this scheme. The length of the pilot allowed for Heritage Connectors to be trained but not to capture the number of people they then signposted. In order to create a robust evidence bank, we need investment in long-term evaluation of wellbeing impact, which can only happen when an equally long-term intervention is properly resourced to enable a large amount of people to be involved over a prolonged period of time.

It is not always possible to attract an external evaluator; most small local VCSE and heritage organisations will not have such resources. For the Heritage Connectors pilot in Frome, it was important to have the detailed external evaluation, so we could offer lessons learned and recommendations to others when implementing the scheme.

A simple monitoring and evaluation approach, well suited to the local circumstances and needs can also be appropriate. It can range from a “before and after” questionnaire (developed together with participants and partners, so that they are comfortable with the questions and happy to take part in the surveys), to potentially a range of focus group discussions, capturing people's thoughts, experiences and suggestions in a more informal but meaningful way.

Another way to capture individual experiences is case studies. Heritage Connectors in Frome has been the subject of several case studies already. For other Heritage Connectors schemes in future, case studies will continue to be a valuable way to present what worked and how, as well as to capture the highlights and feedback from participants and partners. Case studies capture people's stories well and often this is what wins over minds and hearts more successfully than the dry data.

Heritage Connectors

There are a range of resources for evaluating heritage and wellbeing projects, such as the ones offered on [What Works for Wellbeing Centre webpages](#), the [ONS guidance](#) and the [Gov.uk pages on wellbeing evaluation](#). Another useful tool is the [NLHF's Evaluation guidance](#), including on how to evaluate against their outcomes, one of which is wellbeing. [Historic England's Heritage and the Wellbeing Economy](#) gives a review and examples of methodology and evaluation approaches that could be applied to heritage

as well as further useful examples of heritage wellbeing evaluation, such as the [Human Henge Evaluation report by the Restoration Trust](#). There is also a growing resource bank of evidence on social prescribing available on [NASP's website](#).

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to evaluation – and it all depends on the scale, needs and characteristic of the place and communities involved.

What the project succeeded in doing

- Partners were brought together to decide on the Information Access Points
- Discover Frome website built on its heritage section to develop a directory which also included the wellbeing impact of engaging with heritage.
- Regular Heritage Café was formed with good numbers of attendees.
- 70 people were trained as Heritage Connectors
- The social prescribing link workers were trained as Heritage Connectors and this helped them understand the wellbeing impacts of heritage and also became more aware of the local heritage activities. This enabled them to feel more knowledgeable and confident to signpost to heritage activities. While working with patients, conversations relating to heritage, that they may previously missed, could now be picked up on and conversations built upon.
- Knowing the wellbeing benefits of engagement with heritage, challenged people's perception that heritage activities were a 'nice to have'. This was a real shift for the SPLWs.
- The Social prescribing service, Health Connections, added Heritage Wellbeing to their directory of services for the first time. This then impacted other SPLW teams to consider what heritage activities there are in their area to also include on the directory.
- As well as having the new Heritage Wellbeing category, Health Connections also included the wellbeing benefits at the top of the listing. This has then led to the consideration of building in the wellbeing benefits for all the category listings for other topics. This had been a gap and it was highlighted by this pilot but will now go on to improve the directory for all the categories of social prescribing activities.

“We hadn't really thought about the link between heritage and wellbeing before the session. I was especially interested in information around the industry and crafts in the area and could see how several patients I have worked with would have appreciated discussing these aspects and enjoyed attending the heritage café where I saw people socialise with others with similar interests.”

Julie Carey-Downes, Health Connections Frome Area Manager

Funding

The Heritage Connectors project was funded fully by Historic England as one of their pilots to test different approaches to social prescribing through engagement with heritage. It is appreciated that this funding model cannot be replicated in every place. However, we hope that the findings of this pilot will help a variety of local VCSE organisations and local authorities, alongside their health sector partners, to implement the Heritage Connectors scheme as part of what they already do or plan to do locally.

Ideally, there will be resource to help team members do the preparatory work, map the local heritage provision and bring together local partners interested in raising awareness about the wellbeing benefits of heritage.

In all cases, whether starting from scratch or building the Heritage Connectors scheme as an element of an existing programme, effective partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders (especially local health partners and social prescribers, as well as the local authorities) are crucial. Co-production from the beginning will help not only gathering financial support for the various strands of this scheme but will enable the development of a rich and relevant offer.

In terms of funding, the Heritage Connectors pilot highlighted two important issues.

a) It takes time and effort to develop meaningful relationships and partnerships that could make a difference. Therefore, limited time frames and project-restricted funding will never suffice for bringing real life impact. For schemes and programmes like this it is important to invest in understanding local landscapes and needs, in collaborating with the right partners supporting the groups who will benefit most from this work, and in allowing the schemes to grow at the right pace; there is a need to build trust and good will between partners and beneficiaries, to bring in the right variety of voices, and to nurture a diverse and creative process of knowledge exchange and co-production.

b) Sustainable long-term investment in schemes like Heritage Connectors will bring back long-lasting and meaningful positive outcomes for individuals and communities, as well as for the heritage sector itself. It is already clear that even a short exposure to supported and accessible exploration of heritage for wellbeing opens up a whole new world of opportunities for partners, prospective Heritage Connectors and for health sector colleagues too.

As wellbeing continues to be one of the main outcomes most funders (in the heritage sector and beyond) are looking to encourage, and as social prescribing is continuing to grow as a means to deliver wellbeing outcomes (especially to those most affected by health inequalities), schemes and approaches such as Heritage Connectors will have a good chance of being supported if backed up by the right partnerships and the right focus on place and need.

As NASP and others are busy exploring new sustainable funding models for social prescribing, such as Shared Investment Funds and ongoing commitment to social prescribing in health budgets, it becomes more and more important to help connect these new investment streams to local opportunities for developing programmes, such as Heritage Connectors. They will ensure that communities stay supported and connected, while optimising all the resources and assets they have around them.

Conclusion

One of the aims of the Heritage Connectors pilot was to look at ways to support continuous engagement after the end of the project. Encouragingly, Frome Heritage CIC expressed an interest to continue hosting the monthly Heritage Cafes, while both Discover Frome and Health Connections will continue to maintain the online directories signposting people to wellbeing heritage activities.

The learnings and evidence from the Heritage Connectors pilot helped create this case study as part of the Connector toolkit, which will now be shared widely and will help other locations and organisations to potentially implement the scheme. Both Historic England and NASP will offer these resources as part of their advice and guidance on heritage, wellbeing and social prescribing on their websites.

Heritage Connectors are a brilliant example of how a sector-specific connector can help people find what is available within that sector's provision locally to support their health and wellbeing. The scheme has given us invaluable insight into how connectors can work with the wider social prescribing system.

Through the work of all partners involved in Heritage Connectors pilot in Frome, we found a variety of ways the scheme can be woven into other larger products and a range of heritage activities and help with community engagement and outreach.

In terms of legacy, the pilot has already attracted a lot of attention – nationally and internationally and the project team have been contacted by representatives of heritage, health and community sectors from Wales, Scotland, Sweden, Singapore and Japan.

The learnings from the Heritage Connectors pilot in Frome will also inform the emerging Heritage and Social Prescribing guidance for social prescribing link workers, which Historic England and NASP are developing.

The last step will be to publish results and share lessons learnt to inform further policy and strategic work on heritage and wellbeing and support the progress of social prescribing as a method of wellbeing delivery. This will happen not only as a result of the publication of this toolkit, but also as part of [NASP webinar series](#), through both [Historic England's](#) and [NASP's Heritage and Social Prescribing advice and guidance hubs](#), and by presentation of evidence and case studies at forthcoming conferences and publications.

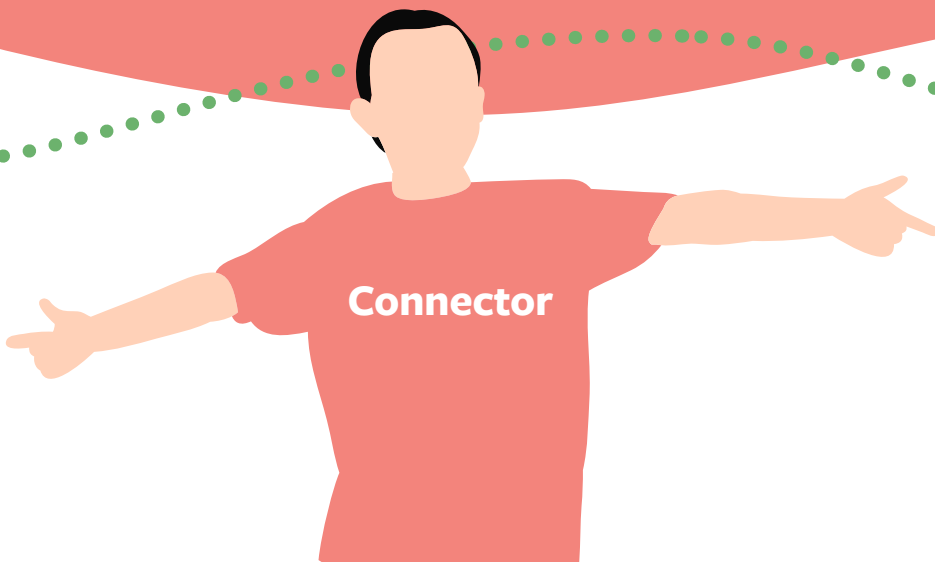
Heritage is all around us and belongs to all of us, wherever we live and whatever we do or look like. It is made of all our stories and memories, and it is constantly changing and evolving. Heritage is a constantly living thing, which makes us and the places we live in what we are.

Heritage Connectors can help more people find all this for themselves and take them on a journey of discovery – of their local heritage, their own story and the meaning of being a human. As individuals and as members of our communities, we all need to feel a part of something bigger and to know that we are valued and we belong. Our heritage could be that invisible link to bring people together and help us be healthier and happier.

Section 3

Organisation Based Connectors

These Connectors pass on information about what a particular organisation provides in their community.



What are Organisation Based Connectors?

Organisation Based Connectors pass on information about what a particular organisation provides in their community. Anyone and everyone can be an Organisation Based Connector, there is no need to already be connected to the organisation.

An example might be Library Connectors. In the training the Library Connectors could learn about the wealth of information and activities that are available for people in their local library. The simple message they then pass on is that their library has lots going on and they can find out more by looking at the library website, information leaflet or just popping into the library. The aim being that Library Connectors increase the knowledge in the community that libraries offer more than loaning books.

Another example is Social Prescribing Link Worker Service Connectors. In the training the SPLW Service Connectors could learn about what social prescribing is, why it is important, who can benefit and how to access the service. The simple message that SPLW Service Connectors pass on would simply be that the service is there and how to access it.

A further example is Men's Shed UK Connectors. In the online training the Men's Shed Connectors learn about Men's Sheds, what they are and the difference they make in the community. The simple message Men's Shed Connectors pass on is that if people want to set up a Men's Shed or find their a shed near them, they visit Men's Shed UK website. Any organisation could have Connectors promoting the value of their work.

Connector Toolkit Contact Details

Support to explore and help implement Connector Programmes to other areas of the UK is funded by The Lockwood Charitable Foundation and hosted by Spark Somerset.

If you would like to explore the Connector Model and find out about the support that can be offered to you, visit We Are Connectors www.weareconnectors.org website or email Jenny Hartnoll at connect@weareconnectors.org



Health Connections Mendip, Frome Medical Practice, Frome Case Study
[Jenny Hartnoll j.hartnoll@nhs.net](mailto:j.hartnoll@nhs.net)

Desi Gradinarova Historic England, Senior Policy Adviser, Wellbeing and Heritage
desi.gradinarova@historicengland.org.uk

Or Desi Gradinarova National Lead for the Historic Environment, National Academy for Social Prescribing
desi.gradinarova@nasp.info

A/Prof J.R. Baker, Chair, Australian Social Prescribing Institute of Research and Education;
Associate Professor, Faculty of Health, Southern Cross University **jrbaker@sp.edu.au**

Toolkit design: [Inkcap Design](#)

Version 1, April 2024