



National
Academy
for Social
Prescribing

Connecting

The System

FLIPBOOK

Children & Young People's social prescribing
in action



Background

Across England, there are some amazing social prescribing programmes for children and young people. There are programmes for young people delivered through schools, youth organisations and charities; programmes targeted at young people in the justice system or care leavers; and programmes for young people who are being treated by children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) or on the waiting list for support.

However, these services are not available everywhere, and there is not equitable access across the country. Too many children and young people are falling through the gaps.

If we could create a truly connected system, what would it look like?

Elements of a

Social Prescribing System





Children & Young People Wellbeing Measurement

Measuring the thoughts and feelings of young people over time allows for the identification of trends in their wellbeing. Consistency in measurement can facilitate meaningful and standardised comparisons.

Identifying what matters most to young people is a key ingredient for a social prescribing approach. As we will see demonstrated through case studies, being able to understand different aspects of wellbeing and the things that influence and impact on young people's wellbeing provides a strong position from which to consider solutions.

Social Prescriptions and Universal Provision

Universal services are available to all children and young people regardless of background, need or risk level. These can be provided through youth clubs, community centres, sports programmes, arts groups, and voluntary-sector wellbeing initiatives.

Universal services promote equality, reduce stigma and can help to identify emerging issues early. They provide consistent, preventative support that can help young people stay healthy and safe. By offering stable environments, positive relationships and opportunities for development, universal services strengthen wellbeing and resilience, improving long-term outcomes for all young people.

These services also play a key role in early identification of emerging issues, as trusted adults can notice changes in a young person and may be able to connect them to additional support if needed - such as targeted prevention.



Unlike universal programmes, which are for whole populations of young people regardless of risk, targeted programmes focus on those identified as being vulnerable due to personal, familial, or social factors, which may include poverty and adverse childhood experiences.

Targeted prevention programmes are specifically designed to support young people who are at higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes, such as school exclusion, mental health issues, substance misuse, or experience of the care system.

Benefits of targeted prevention include a personalised approach to support for young people, which is a key ingredient of social prescribing; improved life outcomes; a reduction in social harm; and wider community benefits.

Targeted prevention is also a precursor to early intervention approaches.

Targeted Prevention Programmes



Early intervention programmes have some similarity to targeted approaches, using early identification and focusing on helping those most at risk rather than all young people. There is also the aim of stopping problems from worsening or reoccurring in the future.

In this resource, we are defining early intervention as having the additional elements of multi-agency collaboration, with education, health, social care and community services working together. There may also be family involvement. Early intervention programmes may include supporting across family hubs, education settings and young people's hubs.

Again, this approach is based on intervening before risk increases or harms are experienced. Where this is not possible, secondary prevention may be required.

Early Intervention Programmes

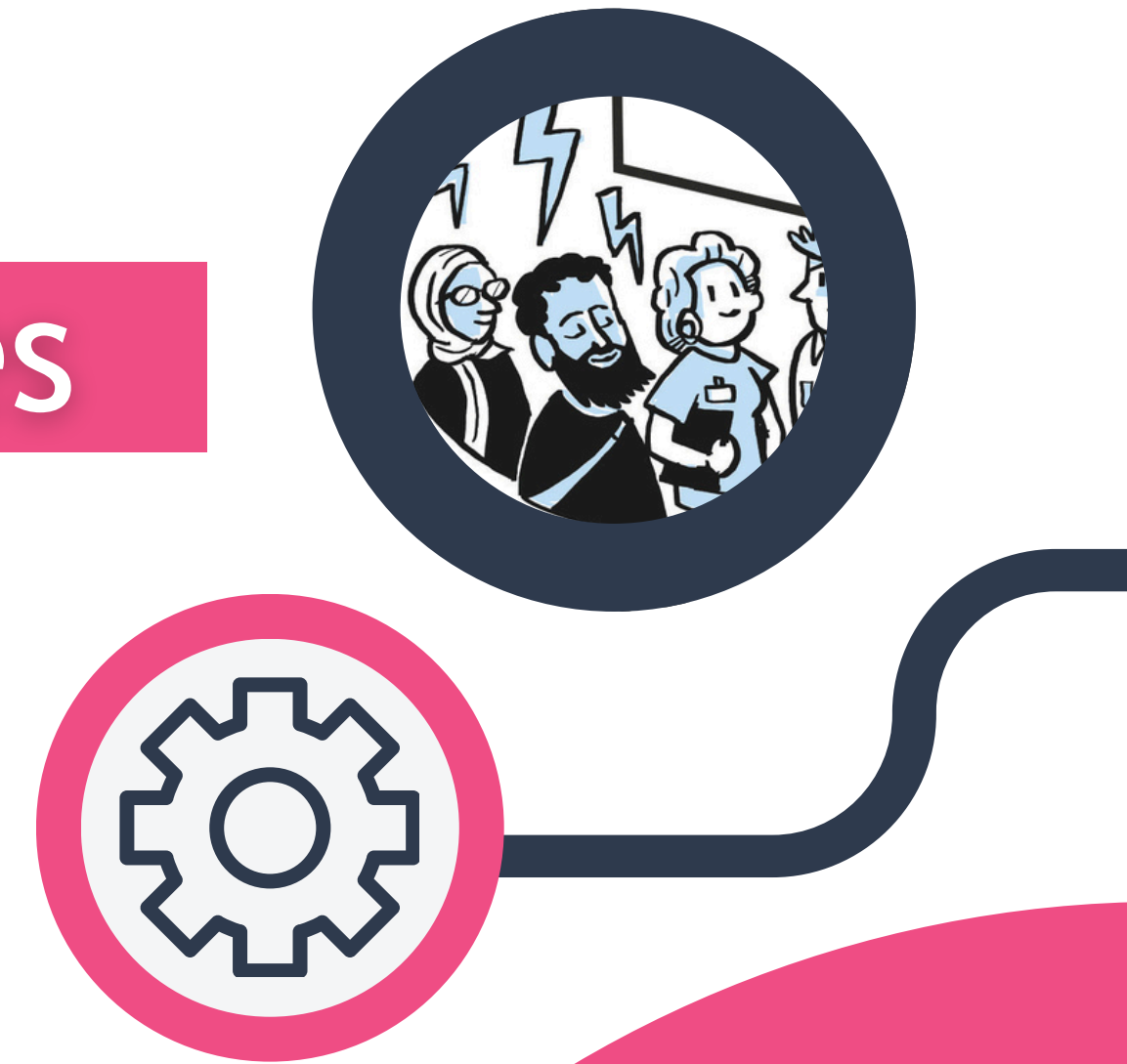


Secondary Prevention Programmes and Wrap Around Support

Where a young person has already experienced mental health challenges and been referred to specialist mental health support services, secondary prevention can help to support better long-term outcomes.

Supporting children and young people waiting for specialist mental health support can help prevent their mental health from worsening while they are waiting. Support after they are discharged can help with maintaining their wellbeing and help them to (re)integrate into targeted or universal community provision.

One way in which secondary prevention is provided is through specialist link workers based in NHS multi-disciplinary teams.



Treatment Services

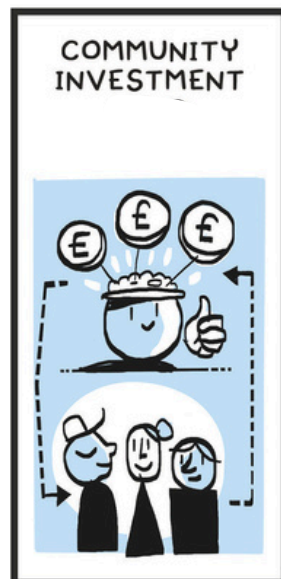


Social prescribing can offer support for children and young people who are receiving treatment in clinical settings.

This could include young people who are supported by specialist mental health services and young people with complex or long-term health conditions that lead to regular visits to or extended stays in hospital to support their mental health.



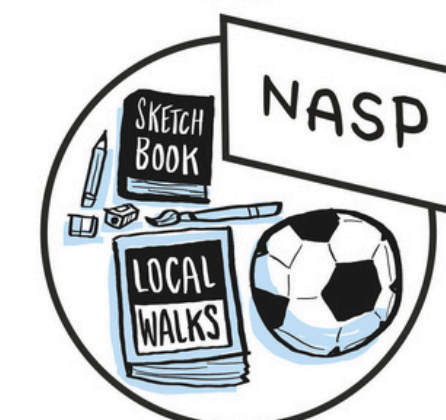
WELLNESS & PRESCRIBING APPROACH



MOVING TO A CONNECTED SYSTEM



COMPLEX & DIAGNOSED MENTAL HEALTH SOCIAL PRESCRIBING MODEL

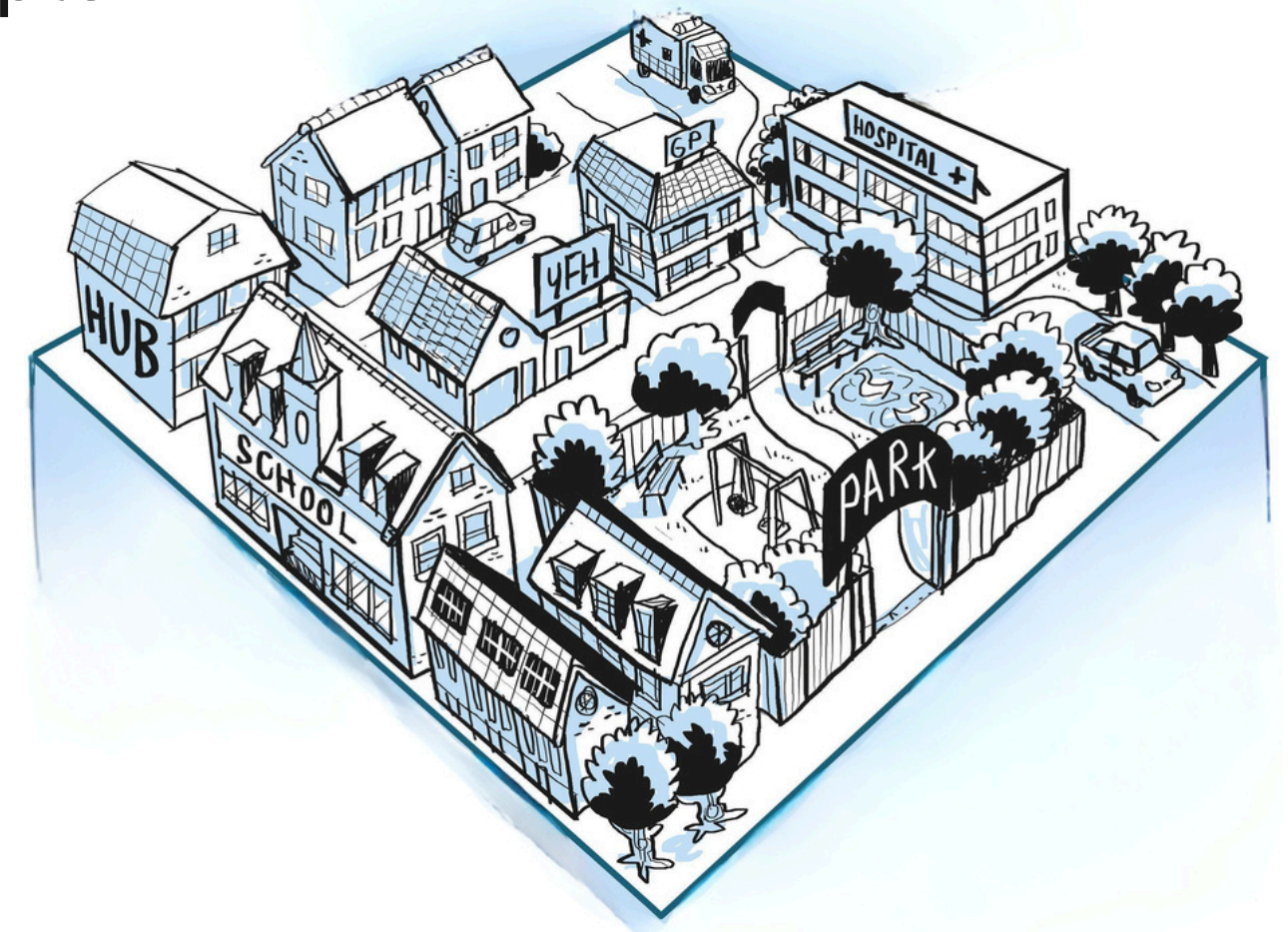


The current system is fragmented, with inconsistent pathways and limited coordination between education, health and community sectors.

It's Not One Size Fits All

For social prescribing to work effectively for children and young people, community resources need to be tailored to their specific needs, with friendly, youth-appropriate environments and trusted figures. Models should be co-designed around local insights, understanding what young people want, where they go, and how they prefer to access help.

Here are some examples of programmes and approaches across the country, which provide a blueprint for a connected systems approach ...



#BeeWell

Measuring the wellbeing of all children and young people regularly and in the right way would allow better decision-making and targeting of support.

It would help identify groups of children and young people who may benefit from social prescribing. Targeted prevention and early intervention programmes would support groups who are most in need. That could then lead to 'social prescriptions' of positive activities and practical support for those individuals who stand to benefit.

#BeeWell is an example of a programme measuring children and young people's wellbeing and using that data to drive system response. Since 2021, they've listened to the voices of more than 130,000 young people across Greater Manchester and Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton, working with around 300 schools.



More details on the
#BeeWell and its approach
can be found at
beewellprogramme.org



StreetGames

StreetGames delivers universal access to sport

StreetGames delivers positive change using a tried-and-tested way of working called Doorstep Sport. This is the core of everything they do, ensuring young people in under-served communities get the chance to participate in sport in a way that is accessible, inclusive, and relevant to them.

What “Doorstep Sport” Means

Doorstep Sport is a way of working for engaging under-served young people in physical activity. It removes traditional barriers by making sport affordable, convenient, and inclusive.

What Doorstep Sport Delivers for Young People

- Connection & Belonging
- Safe Environments
- New Horizons
- Voice & Leadership
- Skills for Life
- Positive Mentorship



Movember Ahead of the Game

Movember Ahead of the Game is a mental health literacy and resilience programme that's reached over 45,000 young people (as of November 2025) across England. The programme is also being scaled into Scotland through Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH).

Grown by Movember, and supported by Rugby League Cares, Movember Ahead of the Game is an expert-backed youth mental health programme that teaches players, parents, coaches and volunteers to understand mental health and build mental fitness. When faced with challenges in sport and life, young players will know who they can talk to right away, and that their community has their back.

Young people are also connected to positive activities in their community. Encouraging them to be part of a group or club can reduce loneliness and isolation and improve connectedness.

Movember Ahead of the Game is overseen by Rugby League Cares in England and Wales, and delivered at place by 23 professional sports foundations including Everton FC Foundation, Wigan Warriors Foundation and Yorkshire Cricket Foundation.

The programme evaluation in 2022 found that 92% of young people “felt more confident in recognising the signs of mental health conditions in myself and others.”

Learn more at
rugbyleaguecares.org/ahead-of-the-game



Healthy Hyde

“Interventions such as Healthy Hyde can make a substantial difference in a student's life... building positive relationships and addressing specific needs of young people.”

- Teacher's Feedback



Healthy Hyde Primary Care Network provides a school-based social prescribing programme which offers proactive, preventative support.

Young people are identified by SENDCos, teachers, parents or clinical staff including CYPMHS. The Children & Young People Wellbeing Team work across over 30 schools (primary and secondary), providing interventions covering social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Using a Mindful Emotion Coaching approach, young people are encouraged to grow their internal resources and life skills, learn about the science behind their emotions and stress, and develop emotional literacy to enable healthier decision making. Sessions include a mixture of children talking about their feelings and playing games involving physical activity.

The team have approximately 120 to 150 contacts with pupils each week and hold one-to-one sessions for those not comfortable in a group environment. For those not attending school, sessions are held at a local active centre. Children and young people may also be signposted to a wide range of local support and community activities.

For more information visit [Healthy Hyde's website](#)



INcreasing AdolesCent social and community support (INACT)

This project has developed social prescribing referral pathways via primary and secondary schools for children and young people who are reporting high levels of loneliness. It was set up by UCL.

Results from the pilot showed that there was evidence that social prescribing was seen by school staff and pupils as feasible and acceptable. It also showed social prescribing decreased loneliness when compared to signposting (getting a leaflet detailing source of support). A trial for INACT exploring the clinical and cost effectiveness of this social prescribing pathway is now underway.



Learn more on the [UCL website](#)

Yorkshire Health Partners Young People's Social Prescriber for Care Leavers

A social prescriber has been specifically employed to work with care leavers in Hull city. The social prescriber works with young people aged 16-25, including asylum seekers who have been in care.

The aim is to connect them to their local community and support them into education and employment or volunteering, as they move into their own accommodation often away from where they have had their last placement.

The social prescriber can also support them with low level mental health and wellbeing needs.

"We have found that we need to start working with the young people at an earlier age, so reduced the age range to include 16-18 which is when they often start to transition. We based the social prescriber initially in the care leavers team building but have found through feedback from the young people that they prefer to be seen in other venues as they do not want to be labelled as different."

-Yorkshire Health Partners



Learn more about Yorkshire Health Partners at
yorkshirehealthpartners.co.uk/social-prescribing

East Sussex Social Prescribing within Schools

East Sussex County Council secured resource from NHS Sussex to pilot two social prescribing projects, working closely with Primary Care Networks and schools. The first supported the provision of a social prescriber and fully funded positive activities for children and young people within the Foundry Primary Care Network in East Sussex, and supported costs of the positive activities for Bexhill Primary Care Network's existing children and young people's social prescribing offer.

The second supported two social prescribers to prescribe positive activities to 96 children (24 per school) in Years 5 and 6 from four primary schools in the High Weald and Lewes areas of East Sussex.

Schools were chosen to be the referral sites based on the amount of contact that school staff have with children and young people and the opportunities they have to notice changes in their mental health, wellbeing, behaviour and attendance.

The children and young people involved in these projects showed improvements:

- **86% had an improved mental health and emotional wellbeing score**
- **78% had improved school attendance**

Connect Together

Connect Together was a community-based social prescribing service delivered by link workers. It supported school-age children and young people and their families and particularly focused on wellbeing and isolation.

The service was integrated into GP surgeries, where 39% of referrals came from. Other referrals came from school networks, early help hubs, social care and from self-referrals. Children and young people were referred to a link worker, who would help them create a wellbeing plan and connect them to community-based services.

Outcomes:

- 98% have made progress in at least one goal
- 81% improve mental health
- 48% improve physical health
- 94% felt listened to and supported
- 90% would recommend the service

Onward referrals:

- 13% to education and skills learning
- 45% to community youth and sports activities
- 43% into community health e.g. drug and alcohol services, community mental health support, finance and food bank support



Learn more on the
[Barca Leeds website](#)



Link Social Prescribing Service

“Through a simple yet meaningful activity like a trip to the cinema, two young people who began the day as strangers were able to share their struggles, support each other, and leave with a sense of hope and connection.”

Barnardo's has established Cumbria LINK. Young people are referred to link workers by GPs, other healthcare professionals or schools.

Link workers work individually with young people on issues that are affecting them, including low self-esteem, social isolation and school-related worries. They offer drop-in wellbeing groups and also work with a variety of community groups.

Interventions are tailored to each child or young person, but could include role-play to discuss anxiety, walks, craft days and cinema clubs.

66% of children and young people made a statistically significant improvement using the Outcomes Rating Scale.

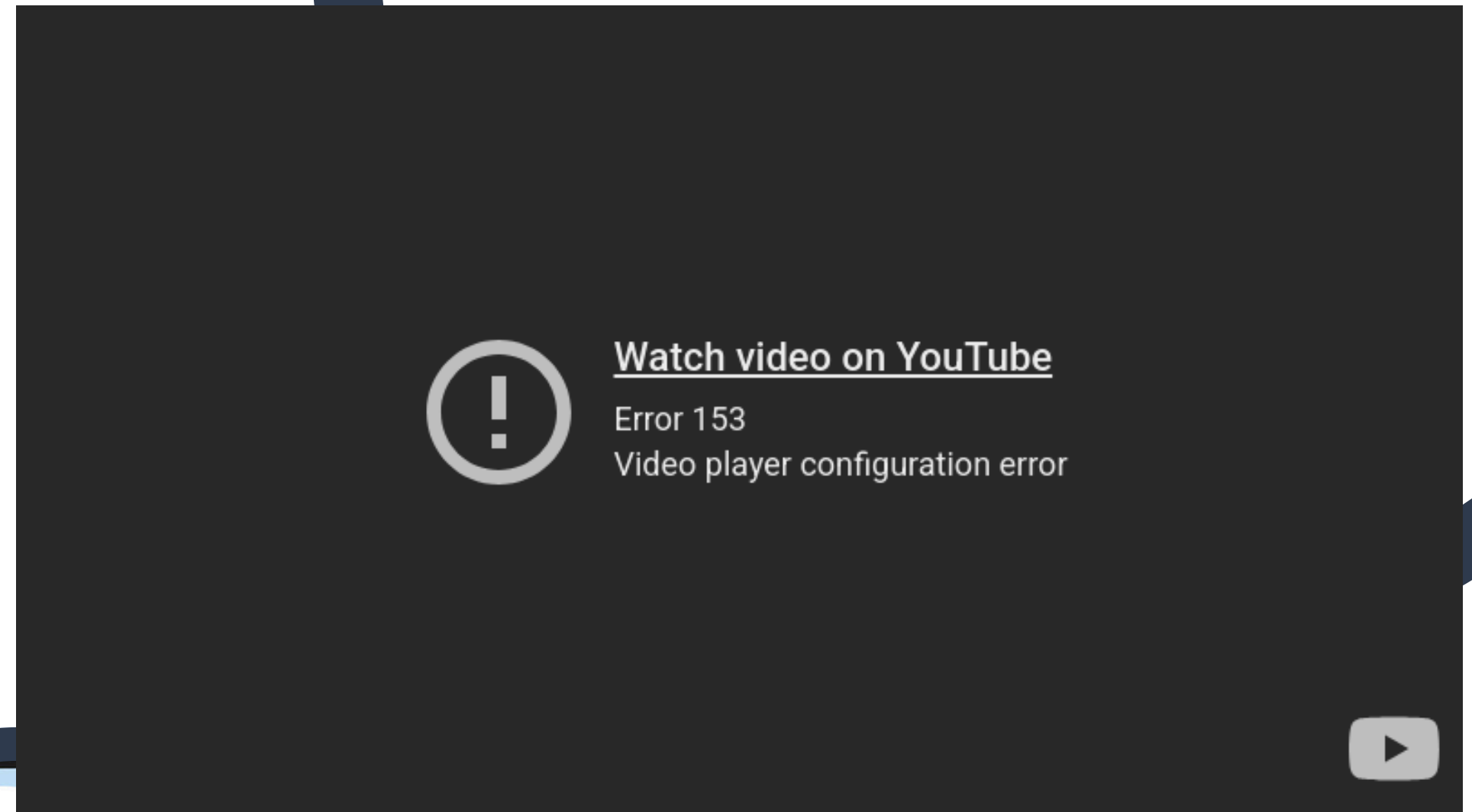
The cost benefit analysis showed a value of £1.80 for every one £1 invested.

Read Barnardo's [The Missing Link: Social Prescribing for Children & Young People report](#)

Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT)

Growing Resilience in Teens (GRIT) is an example of a 'social prescription' that young people can be connected to. It supports young people to improve their mental health through non-contact boxing group programmes, workshops and one-to-one coaching. The service supports people aged 11-24 in Hitchin and Letchworth.

Young people are referred to the programme from a variety of routes, including through referrals from healthcare professionals, education settings and self-referrals. The majority of referrals come directly from schools.



Learn more about GRIT at
<https://gritcharity.org/>

GRIT; GROWING
RESILIENCE
IN TEENS

Turn the Page

'Before I found this space, I didn't know how to express what I was feeling. CAMHS just didn't suit me - it felt too clinical, and I couldn't connect. I was struggling with suicidal thoughts, and I didn't think I could go on. But through comics, I've found a way to tell my story, to show the pain I couldn't speak about. It's given me a safe place to exist, a way to process everything I've been through. Comics didn't just help me cope - they've saved my life.' - R, 17.

Learn more at
[Turn the Page](#)

The Turn the Page project by Comics Youth CIC is an example of a creative “social prescription”. It was a creative wellbeing initiative designed to support young people aged 16-25 who experience anxiety and/or depression and often fall through the cracks of traditional mental health services. The programme uses comics as an autobiographical narrative tool, allowing participants to explore and articulate their lived experiences through visual storytelling. Young people can be referred by professionals in the Merseyside area or may refer themselves.

An independent evaluation conducted by the University of Liverpool demonstrated significant improvements among participants:

- 86% of young people reported an improvement in mental health.
- 66% experienced a reduction in suicidal ideation.
- 74% reported a significant increase in social connectedness after 12 weeks of participation.



Dandelion Time - A Social Prescription for Children and Families

Dandelion Time is an example of a nature-based social prescription for children. The charity provides nature-based therapy to children, aged 6 to 13 who have typically experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences.

Providing early intervention not only impacts the child and their family in the short term but aims to improve the long-term physical, emotional and mental health of those that attend and break the intergenerational cycle. Referral sources for Dandelion came from Early Help, Social Workers, GP, Schools, or those working other professional agencies.



[Watch video on YouTube](#)

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The programme has brought positive changes to children's psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence and resilience. Most children who attended re-entered or engaged better with school, became less isolated and experienced reduced anxiety, fear and other emotional symptoms.

83% improved emotional wellbeing

75% improved family relationships

83% improved confidence

83% improved self esteem



**Dandelion
Time**

Learn more at dandeliontime.org.uk

Rejuvenate

A participant said, “I was oblivious to what I was capable of, now I know what I can achieve.”



[Watch video on YouTube](#)

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Historic England’s Rejuvenate pilot, which was delivered by Wessex Archaeology and Isle Heritage, was an example of Wellbeing Archaeology through school and youth justice referrals. It was the first to test the ability of archaeology and heritage activities focused on expanding the capacity of vulnerable young people to appreciate their own potential where it is suppressed by circumstance or self-belief.

Two pilot projects - one for a year 9 school group struggling with attendance and engagement and one to support children in the youth justice system - were carried out, bringing self-determination theory together with a bespoke archaeological intervention.

As a result of taking part, the children in youth justice showed an increased perseverance and openness to learning, as well as strengthened ability to complete tasks and follow instructions.

The programme helped them have a different perspective on life and move away from negative thoughts, and they had enhanced motivation to build a positive future.

For the year 9 school pilot, students reported the following:

- 89% felt more in control of their behaviour within school
- 6.9% increase in attendance compared to a control group
- 28% rise in ability to feel heard and proud

Two years after the school programme, 100% of participants still had improved attendance, compared to 42% of the control group.

Read full evaluation report at: [Pilots for archaeology-led wellbeing for young people](#)

The Advantage Mentoring Talking Tactics Programme

Programme Impact:

- 76% improve life functioning
- 65% feel less stressed and better at managing stress
- 78% enhance overall wellbeing
- 91% progress towards their goals
- 68% make significant goal progress

Talking Tactics (from Advantage Mentoring CIC, in partnership with NHS CYPMHS) is a mental health mentoring programme delivered at local football clubs. It is designed for children and young people aged 11-21 with mild to moderate mental health needs. Referrals come from NHS CYPMHS, schools, youth clubs or football club community organisations.

The programme offers weekly one-to-one mental health mentoring for up to six months, focusing on personal development, education, social skills, employment or wellbeing. Mentors, supported by clinicians, help with issues like familial challenges, bullying, and low self-esteem, using empathy and goal-based strategies to support positive outcomes.

'I wasn't going to school, but Talking Tactics helped me manage my anger. Now I'm back and aiming for college!'

– C,
Southampton Saints
participant

Safety Nets

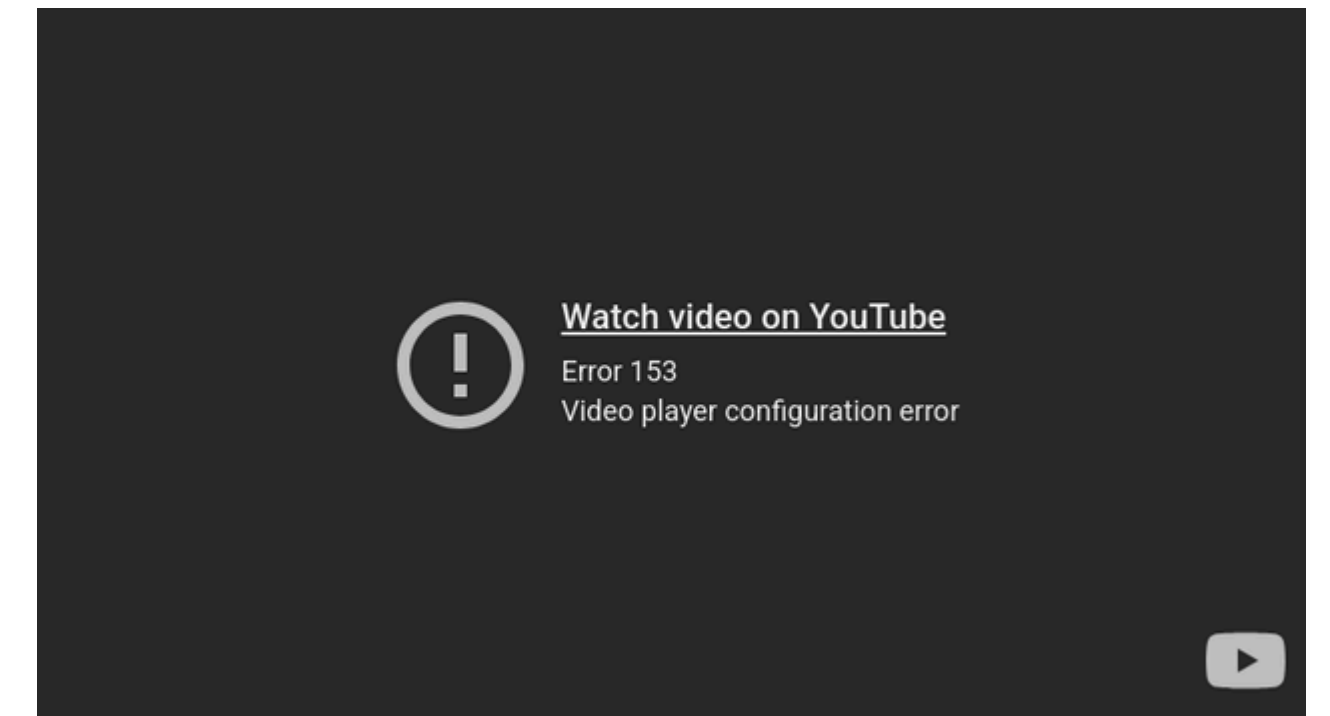
Safety Nets is an eight-week group programme for young people who are on waiting lists for NHS mental health services. Group sessions are co-delivered by sports coaches and clinicians together at local professional sports stadiums (usually football or rugby clubs). Sessions involve one hour of multi-sport physical activity and one hour of psychoeducation, covering topics like anxiety, social media, peer relationships, sleep and diet.

Research has shown that Safety Nets can support young people with their mental health and confidence as well as increase their involvement in local community groups. Young people valued the fact that sessions were run at community settings like sports stadiums, rather than clinical settings.



“I think it’s wonderful to see how some people can blossom in terms of managing their anxiety, overcoming their shyness and growing in self-belief.”

– Clinician



Wellbeing While Waiting



[Watch video on YouTube](#)

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`"I found [social prescribing] really helpful. [My social prescriber] was very nice. She really helped me get back into social groups and social settings, so I was more comfortable around people."`

`- young person`

This project has developed social prescribing referral pathways for children and young people who are awaiting support from NHS mental health services. It was set up by University College London (UCL).

Young people on a waiting list meet with a Link Worker to develop a personalised support plan based on their interests and needs, potentially linking them to community resources. This approach encourages young people to take ownership of their choices and identify their priorities and skills.

Learn more on the [UCL website](#)

SPACE Pilot - Social Prescribing And Community REsources for Children and Young People

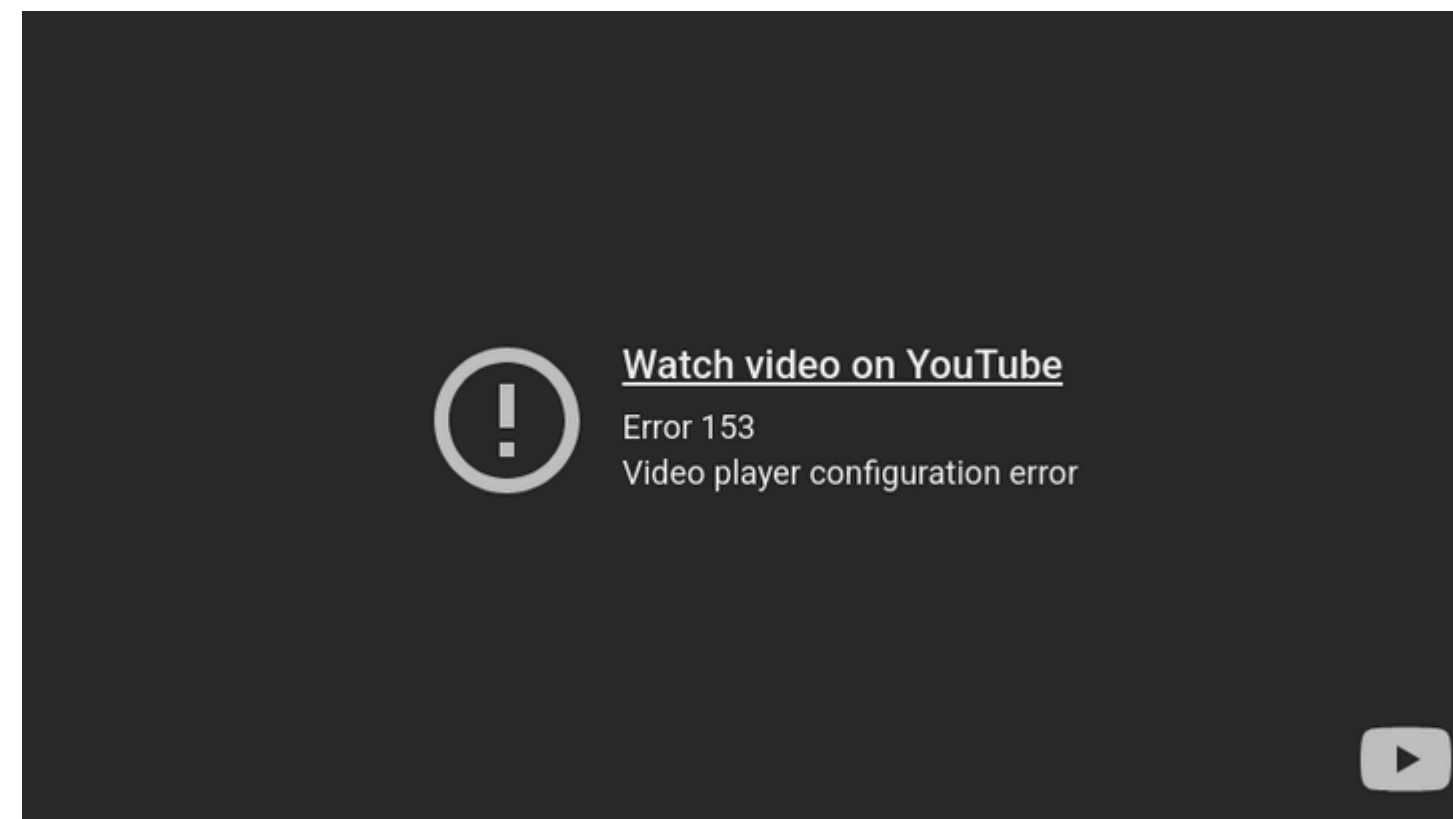
Some children with conditions such as cerebral palsy spend a lot of time in hospital, and their families face social, emotional and financial strain and a lack of community support.

SPACE Pilot is an example of a social prescribing project supporting children and young people with complex medical conditions. It is a partnership between Ways to Wellness and the Great North Children's Hospital.

SPACE Pilot connects families to link workers within the hospital. Link workers provide psychosocial support to the whole family and help them set goals and develop action plans that are meaningful to them, linking them to community services including groups and activities, advice and information, and assistance with education. Support extends beyond discharge into the community, for six months.

“Parents and professionals found link worker support invaluable in making community services accessible. Families felt more connected and less isolated, with increased belief in their self-efficacy.”

– SPACE Pilot evaluation report

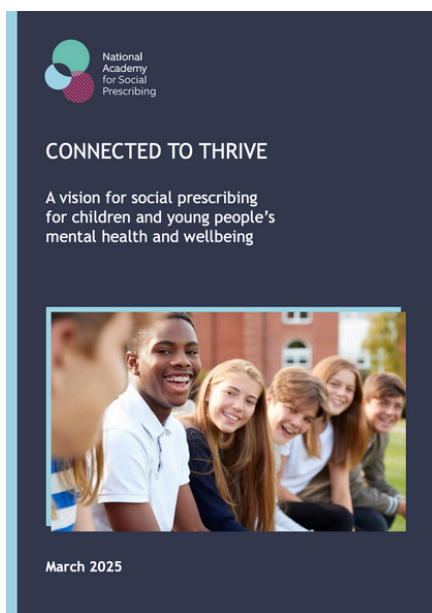


Learn more and read the Newcastle
University evaluation on the Ways to
Wellness website:
waystowellness.org.uk/space-pilot



How can we make this happen?

There are five key elements which could allow for joined-up systems to be developed



Read our Connected to Thrive report for a vision for the future of children and young people's social prescribing, including policy recommendations.

1

Embed children and young people's social prescribing in national strategies and partnerships

2

Grow the Workforce

3

Support the development of high-quality social prescribing programmes and systems.

4

Invest in social prescriptions for children, young people and their families.

5

Build awareness



This flipbook provides a snapshot of a growing field

Find Out More



Find out more about children and young people's social prescribing on the [NASP website](#)



Join the [Social Prescribing Youth Network](#) for up to date news, developments and resources.



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