

Supporting the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector to evaluate social prescribing

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Background

NASP has published 12 rapid evidence reviews to date which have highlighted the need to support the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector with planning and delivering evaluations of social prescribing. We commissioned a rapid scoping review to:

- Identify and collate existing resources that aim to support evaluations of social prescribing programmes, particularly for the VCFSE sector;
- Assess the appropriateness and quality of these resources; and
- Determine whether an additional social prescribing toolkit should be commissioned.

The researchers used a variety of methods to map evaluation toolkits and resources and to gain insights into the current evaluation culture in the VCFSE sector, including challenges faced and learning and training needs.

This briefing summarises the findings of the report, which can be found in full [here](#).



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Overview

A total of 74 of potential resources were identified and reviewed, with 61 meeting the inclusion criteria for this scoping review. Of these:

- 15 were comprehensive toolkits covering all of the evaluation cycle
- 13 were partial toolkits giving an overview, or covering some stages of the evaluation cycle
- 33 resources focused on only one aspect of evaluation, including:
 - Logic models and theory of change
 - Outcome measures
 - Methods (qualitative data, case studies, surveys, economic evaluation)
 - Patient and public involvement
 - Ethics
 - Reporting and dissemination

The review did not find strong demand for another evaluation toolkit, given the large number of existing resources. Instead, it found a need for clear signposting to trusted resources on evaluating social prescribing. The authors produced a series of tables of the 61 resources that met the inclusion criteria as part of the scoping review. A list of the materials found is available in the full report [here](#). NASP will be taking forward work to develop this initial list of resources into an online tool.

How can the VCFSE sector be supported in carrying out evaluations?

The authors analysed qualitative data from a survey, roundtable and one-to-one discussions on how to appropriately support evaluation carried out by the VCFSE sector. Three themes emerged from the analysis, with associated challenges and priorities for any future work.

1. Developing a shared language

Evaluating social prescribing involves collaboration across many sectors and disciplines, with different terminology, meanings and acronyms used. Developing a shared language between different stakeholders could help facilitate and improve discussions between partners and promote a more consistent approach to collecting social prescribing data regionally or nationally. One suggestion was for a glossary of evaluation terms to be produced.



2. Culture and context

The difference in cultures across funders and sectors was identified as a limitation on evaluation activity, with a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data expected from funders, and lack of a consistent approach across different funding streams. Furthermore, VCFSE organisations may draw on multiple funding sources for services, each with potentially different evaluation requirements.

Some gaps in evaluation measures were identified, for example, reporting rarely asking for information on what was tried but did not work. Alternative approaches were also suggested, for example, small organisations could assess or ‘audit’ their experiences against existing evidence on ‘what works’, rather than attempting to measure outcomes or impact. Other suggestions included brokering partnerships between researchers and VCFSE evaluators; exploring digital data collection; and aggregating data across smaller organisations.

3. Learning needs and training

Participants identified a range of evaluation learning and training needs, with the most common need being selecting the right methods for the target group, type of intervention, and size of organisation.

The potential benefits of foundational learning prior to an evaluation being designed or delivered were also highlighted. For example, training would help VCFSE evaluators design approaches, choose appropriate methods and tools, and reduce anxiety and ‘overwhelm’ related to evaluation requirements.

Next steps

NASP will continue to convene and collaborate with stakeholders across sectors to develop good practice in social prescribing evaluation, including:

- Developing a shared language of social prescribing evaluation
- Exploring how VCFSE learning and training needs can be supported
- Identifying opportunities to explore alternative approaches to VCFSE-led evaluation

NASP will develop an online tool to signpost VCFSE organisations to social prescribing evaluation resources.



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About this report

You can read the full report [here](#). It was commissioned by NASP and authored by Dr Marie Polley, Abby Sabey, Dr Helen Seers, and Professor Helen Chatterjee. Please contact the Evidence and Evaluation team at evidence@nasp.info for further information on this work.

About NASP

NASP is a national charity that champions social prescribing. We support and connect people, communities and organisations so that more people across the UK can enjoy better health and wellbeing.



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