

Case study: Social Prescribing Pilot, Haverhill

Haverhill is the fourth largest town in Suffolk. GP surgeries are registered to capacity and there are no walk-in surgeries to meet the various health needs of its residents. Access to secondary health care requires travel to West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St Edmunds or Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge; an issue for those on low incomes due to limited and costly public transport.

Health needs assessments have identified issues around depression, obesity, self-harm and alcohol-related harm. Furthermore, data from the Clinical Commissioning Group identifies that the average number of GP visits in Haverhill is three per year compared to one per year in other towns.

It is estimated that one in five visits to the GP are for social needs such as isolation, debt management, low mood and anxiety. The West Suffolk families and communities team noticed that all of these issues could be addressed through support within the community through established agencies, local support groups or involvement in groups for exercise or hobbies.

Through families and communities officer participation in the ONE Haverhill board, within the health working group, it had been identified that action was needed to support residents, address needs and link effectively with support networks and voluntary/community services.

While discussing the community's needs and through exploring various solutions to address them, members of the families and communities team identified the practice of social prescribing. This is a process where members of a community are referred for non-clinical support to promote well-being and resilience, leading to reduced reliance on primary and statutory services and increased use and knowledge of the voluntary and community sector.

A consultation with local agencies and community members to assess if social prescribing would be welcomed in the town was met with a very positive response. The families and communities team also researched examples of social prescribing from across the country as well as visiting local projects to identify best ways of working.

Following the consultation, the families and communities team has secured funding of £69,000 from Suffolk County Council and £63,768 from the Department for Communities and Local Government for a two year pilot which is known as Haverhill LifeLink.

The pilot, which is due to be launched in June 2017, will be co-produced with involvement from primary and secondary agencies, voluntary and community services, town council, borough council, county council and members of the community. We are developing a project that is bespoke to Haverhill which can be embedded within the local community.