

Beyond Medication: Social Prescribing, A Holistic Approach to Healthcare

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Introduction

- The Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Institute at the University of Sunderland is involved in researching social prescribing
- Local voluntary organizations combat social isolation, drug and alcohol dependency through community events

Objective of Internship

My primary objective was to assist local community organizations and warm spaces, particularly SARA, with their community-building events to learn more about their strategies in implementing social prescribing and their target population.

Work profile

- Event-organizing and voluntary work with local organizations
- Interacted with at-risk populations and kept journal of their experiences and stories in the context of Sunderland
- Assisted in analyzing and summarizing WHO Arts and Wellbeing Report and suggested future community events based on the findings

Reflection

- By assisting **SARA** (*Southwick Altogether Raising Aspirations*, pictured on the right), I gained insight into how the **resilient volunteer community** in Sunderland create a **supportive and nurturing** environment for citizens of all ages.



Pictured: I'm working with the **Sunderland Fire Station** which, in collaboration with SARA, organized a 2-day event for at-risk children, teaching them collaboration and coping skills by mimicking a day in the life of a firefighter.
Photo credit: Vicki Neal



Pictured here is **Austin House** in Southwick, which holds after-school events for at-risk children, walking groups, free lunches and activities for elderly individuals, and reduced-price groceries for those suffering financially. Photo taken from Google Maps.

- By helping the **After School** program at Austin House, I learned how much children at risk of making the wrong choices socially and academically benefit from participating in the visual arts, music, and sports depending on their preferences.
- By taking part in the **walking groups**, I heard both tragic and fascinating stories about the locals' personal lives and the Sunderland community.
- By helping organize the **Over-65 Lunch Club**, I saw how the isolated elderly community had the chance to bond over free food and games such as Bingo, dominos, quizzes, etc.
- By volunteering in **The Bread and Butter Thing**, I helped pack up and distribute low-cost groceries to those in need. I also connected with fellow elderly volunteers who taught me so much about the importance of resilience and compassion in the community.

Looking ahead

- In my future medical career, I have promised myself to view each patient as an individual with a unique story and needs, rather than a problem needing to be fixed.

Questions

- How can we convince the medical professions that social prescribing is effective and just as important as medication?
- How do we link the public health system with social prescribing more efficiently?

Conclusion

- The importance of community-bonding activities and social prescribing has been far underappreciated, and more research and implementation could save millions of lives who are left behind.

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