

The True Value of Community Support: An Observational Analysis of England's Social Prescription System



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Funded by the Center for Health and Wellbeing under the Global Health Program

Introduction

- A two month period of direct observation of several organizations in Sunderland, England delivering support for mental health and overall well being via Social Prescription
- Relationship building and personal exploration of the benefits of the system
- **Social Prescription:** non-clinical approach to mental health support through community partners offering social support and opportunities for personal involvement
- Engagement with different activities offered by social prescribing charities
- Discussions with government officials working to develop and evolve the program



Looking ahead

- Having watched clients' conviction about the effectiveness of VICs, I am curious if there are ways in which the American charitable sector might benefit from an approach informed by Britain's
- I look forward to the development of research testimony on the effectiveness of this system insofar as it could be used persuasively to launch similar programming in the US
- I am more inspired to pursue studies in psychology knowing that psychological foundations are a crucial part of this treatment puzzle
- I feel empowered to believe that kindness and compassion in informal contexts have great value

Points for Further Investigation

- Veterans repeatedly emphasized the value of VICs being an affinity space run primarily by people who they felt were their own
 - What does this mean for people who wish to enter a space that they don't have previous experience with?
- To what degree is this system only effective due to the unique environmental and societal factors within Sunderland England?
- What would a US equivalent of social prescription look like in practice?
- How can Princeton think about creating community spaces like those fostered by social prescription?

Objective of Internship

To observe the system of social prescription in order to ascertain its strengths and weaknesses while assisting in community building and volunteer work

Work profile

- Veterans in Crisis (VICs) provides a variety of services including housing, employment, and counseling support in addition to weekly opportunities for social engagement to aid in personal + community wellbeing
- Engaged in weekly programming and relationship building within the veterans community
- Examined cross organizational similarities and differences via reflection
 - Spoke with local government employees, Southwick Although Raising Aspirations (SARA), and Southwick Salvation Army
 - Connected with a local university in order to understand the scholarly research emerging around this topic

Reflection

- Required a high level of compassion and adaptability as well as a willingness to listen with empathy and critical compassion
- I was perpetually awed by the conviction and vulnerability with which veterans speak about the positive impact VICs had on their lives, many of whom attested that the organization had saved their lives
- Clients placed a crucial focus on the importance of the quality of the care and genuine care
- Services were most effective because people felt understood and comfortable being themselves within the organization
- Some activities I participated in: a camping trip to assist in the construction of an accessible log cabin, packaging reduced groceries for local families, hikes through natural spaces nearby, weekly domino games, plenty of conversations over tea, and dog walks



Acknowledgements

- Inconceivable thanks to the Center for Health and Wellbeing for sponsoring an authentically live changing experience
- To Veterans in Crisis for their immeasurable kindness, honesty, hospitality, and openness
- To the wonderful folks in Sunderland for sharing their experiences, perspectives, and home