



Social prescribing for children and young people



Introduction to Barnardo's

Leading children's charity Barnardo's is one of the most comprehensive providers of integrated health and social care services for children and young people, with more than 150 years' experience of supporting them through a variety of challenging circumstances.



We work with a range of commissioners and partners including NHS England (NHSE), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Department for Education (DfE) and local authorities (LAs) to support the delivery of cost-effective and innovative integrated health and wellbeing services across prevention, early intervention, targeted and specialist support in a variety of place-based settings throughout the UK.

Our services take a trauma-informed and inclusive approach based on the principles of personalised care and shared decision making. We put the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of what we do to ensure all our services are accessible and appropriate.

Our offer

Barnardo's delivers one of the largest children and young people social prescribing services in England. The LINK service runs across Cumbria and Lancashire and has supported over 900 children and young people aged 5 to 19 since March 2020. It is funded by five Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and meets a growing need for children's mental health services in primary care.

Social prescribing for children and young people is a non-clinical solution to help improve wellbeing, mental and, physical health by connecting children and young people to their friends, peers and local communities. Our service has been co-produced with children and young people, so we know we are offering the right service in the right place at the right time. Many of the young people we support at our LINK service struggle with low mood, anxiety, emotional wellbeing, peer pressure, self-esteem, weight management and relationships. Referrals can be made by schools, GPs, health & community organisations and parents – 96% of referrals are accepted by the service.

Research shows that over 40% of GP appointments are for children and young people¹ and 21% of Emergency Department admissions for children are classed as non-urgent.² Social prescribing is an early intervention offer and, as a system solution, it can prevent escalation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) through meeting the child's needs much earlier on.



Barnardo's support is provided by trained and experienced children's social prescribing Link Workers who listen and offer guidance and support in a range of formats including regular assessments based on the Signs of Wellbeing Assessment Framework, one-to-one and group sessions, drop-in clinics and signposting onwards. Importantly, our Link Workers are embedded within the community, and they maximise their relationships with clinical partners, schools, and grassroots voluntary sector organisations to ensure children and people are signposted on to the services which best suit their needs.

We can offer and deliver social prescribing across primary, secondary and acute care services.

Social prescribing is a way of connecting people to activities, groups, and services that help improve their health and wellbeing (NHS, 2023).



Outcomes

As at the end of December 2023, for 87% of children and young people accessing the LINK service, their outcome rating score was improved compared to the start and end of their support intervention.

In 2021, an independent evaluation of the first-year delivery of the LINK service in Cumbria found the following outcomes achieved by children and young people supported by the service, after the support intervention:

- **88%** feel less isolated
- **78%** have increased self-awareness and feel able to manage emotions
- **66%** experience positive relationships with friends and family

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¹ Healthy London Partnership Children and Young People's Programme (December 2016) Social Prescribing for Children, Young People and Families: A Guide for Commissioners Driving consistency in outcomes across the capital <https://www.healthylondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HLP-CYP-Social-Prescribing-for-CYP-Dec-2016.pdf>

² Simpson, R.M; O'Keefe, C; Jacques, R.M; Stone, T; Hassan, A; Mason S.M (2021) Non-urgent emergency department attendances in children: a retrospective observational analysis Emergency Medicine Journal 0:1-6 doi:10.1136/emered-2021-211431 <https://emj.bmj.com/content/early/2021/10/27/emered-2021-211431>

Case studies

Young person, Age 13

We started working with the young person in February 2021 and completed six virtual sessions over eight weeks. The young person chose virtual sessions rather than meeting face-to-face.

This referral was made to Barnardo's because young person was struggling with bereavement after their grandparent died and they had also experienced bullying at school. The young person wanted support as they felt anxious when being alone, or walking alone, as they were afraid of being kidnapped. They also had not slept in their own bed for several years due to anxiety, and not feeling comfortable when alone.

We helped the young person set themselves two goals:

Goal 1 – To be able to walk into the village alone

Goal 2 – To be able to sleep in my own bed

Together, we explored what was working well in the young person's life, their achievements and what needed to happen to meet their goals. We focused on building strong, trusting connections with the young person. Through our sessions we set short-term, manageable activities and created a positivity toolkit. At the end of the support sessions, the young person was sleeping in their own bed every night (for just over two months when we finished) and was comfortable walking into the village alone on a daily basis.

Service feedback

“ They are hugely grateful to you and feel that you are the one who has got things moving for them after 5 years of nothing!

GP

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“ I was so angry at everyone... I was kicking off at School and at home and then we were all in lockdown and I was just stuck in my room refusing to talk to anyone without it ending up in shouting and screaming. Talking to LINK helped me work out what I was really angry about and also how to try different ways of talking to my family. It didn't always work but things are so much better now, and I can even sit and eat with my brother again.

Leah aged 15

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To find out more

We'd love to hear from you.
Please get in touch via
healthteam@barnardos.org.uk
if you would like more information.

You can also read our social
prescribing publication
'The Missing Link' which outlines
how social prescribing has the
potential to make a real difference
to the mental health of children
and young people as part of
a range of sustainable options
to suit a person's specific needs.



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