Welcome to our April 2021 update. This document is to inform our project partners, co-investigators, interested partners about our progress on the research we are currently developing.

Cultural institutions as social prescribing venues to improve older people’s wellbeing.

This is the question our research seeks to answer. The study is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. [GJU-008781/1].

For this research we are conducting a “realist review”. This work involves reviewing the existing evidence on the research topic and drawing out relevant pieces of information on aspects of social prescribing. The purpose of this is to understand what works for whom, in what context and under what conditions. By doing this, we can build up a “programme theory” of how cultural institutions can work with older people so they can benefit from social prescribing. We aim to present our findings of the programme theory to the wider public, policy makers and others in the future. A copy of the methodology is available by contacting the research team.

Where are we in progressing the research?

Where are we in progressing the research?

• Our questionnaire for link workers to complete has started to be circulated. It asks about the use of and views of cultural offerings as part of social prescribing. It should provide highly valuable feedback and advice on these matters. Some key advice we have received so far includes:

  a. The importance of tailoring activities (e.g. with staff and older people) depending on their needs.
  b. The opportunities that technology can offer (e.g. in reaching otherwise inaccessible people and taking creative risks in developing activities), yet the need to recognise its limitations (e.g. experiences online will be very different from social encounters in physical spaces).
  c. The need for funding to support cultural institutions engaging in social prescribing, and raising awareness of this work.
  d. The long-term effects of Covid-19 on confidence among older people in joining in-person activities, with concerns about safety.
  e. The value of tailoring activities (e.g. with staff and older people) depending on their needs.
  f. The opportunities that technology can offer (e.g. in reaching otherwise inaccessible people and taking creative risks in developing activities), yet the need to recognise its limitations (e.g. experiences online will be very different from social encounters in physical spaces).

Day 1 – discussion with international stakeholders from the cultural sector

Day 1 – discussion with international stakeholders from the cultural sector

On 24th and 25th February, we met with stakeholders. They included international cultural sector staff and older adults. Here is a brief overview of the feedback.

• The importance that cultural institutions attach to building long-lasting, trusting relationships with communities, and the potential role that link workers can play as brokers in this process.
• The opportunities and challenges of engaging older people in the cultural sector, and to understand the key role that cultural institutions play within the community as well as in physical spaces.
• The value of tailoring activities (e.g. with staff and older people) depending on their needs.
• The opportunities that technology can offer (e.g. in reaching otherwise inaccessible people and taking creative risks in developing activities), yet the need to recognise its limitations (e.g. experiences online will be very different from social encounters in physical spaces).

Day 2 – discussion with older adults and link workers

Day 2 – discussion with older adults and link workers

On 31st March, we met with our AHRC project partners to discuss the progress of our research. They included: National Association for Link Workers, Social Prescribing Network, the Australian National Library, the UK, Hong Kong, Denmark and Norway) to discuss the outcomes of our initial findings. Following an incredibly rich discussion, here is some of the feedback we received:

• Positive feedback on ‘holding’ as a component of our programme theory indicating that it is very important to make sense of the cultural offer to older people.
• Concerned about the challenges of digital inclusion (e.g. not having access to a computer or wi-fi) which could impact on older people’s ability to benefit from social prescribing.
• Concerned about the challenges of digital inclusion (e.g. not having access to a computer or wi-fi) which could impact on older people’s ability to benefit from social prescribing.

Thank you for all your contributions

Overall, the generous contribution of stakeholders and project partners during these meetings brought illuminating insights to our project. The list above only offers a glimpse of the valuable feedback we received, which will support our project’s future developments.

Project partners meeting, March 2021

On 2nd March, we met with our AHRC project partners to discuss the progress of our research. Our partners include: National Association for Link Workers, Social Prescribing Network, the Australian National Library, the UK, Hong Kong, Denmark and Norway. They help us to inform our research and develop our programme theory. They also provided highly valuable feedback and advice on these matters. Some key advice we have received so far includes:

• Prof. Kamal R. Mahtani kamal.mahtani@phc.ox.ac.uk
• Prof. Stephanie Tierney stephanie.tierney@phc.ox.ac.uk

Acknowledgements: This research is funded by UKRI/AHRC (AH/V008781/1).

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and not necessarily those of their host institution, organisations mentioned or the study’s funder.