

Study update, April 2021

The cultural sector, older people, well-being and social prescribing

Welcome to our April 2021 update. This document is to inform our project partners, public contributors and other interested parties about our progress on the research we are currently developing.



A short reminder about our research:

Cultural institutions as social prescribing venues to improve older people's wellbeing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: What works, for whom, in what circumstances and why?

This is the question our research seeks to answer. The study is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

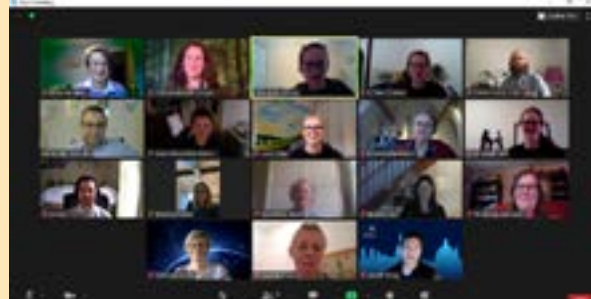
For this research we are conducting a "realist review". This work involves reviewing the existing evidence on the research topic and drawing out relevant pieces of information that allow us to develop a "programme theory". A programme theory is a proposition (often in the form of a model or diagram) of how an intervention (in this case the cultural sector through social prescribing pathways) is thought to work, under what conditions and for whom (we are particularly interested in older people). This will be followed by a "realist evaluation", whereby we collect data from key stakeholders (cultural sector staff, older people and link workers) to further refine and develop our programme theory.

Where are we in progressing the research?

- We have finished analysing the selected articles and reports that we previously screened as part of our literature review. This analysis helped us to refine our initial programme theory. It also highlighted areas requiring further investigation through the interviews and survey that we are currently conducting. We are writing up findings of the literature review to submit to a scientific journal for publication.
- We have started recruiting older people and cultural sector staff to interview. So far, over a dozen older adults have volunteered, and nine interviews have already taken place. Cultural sector staff are currently being contacted and we hope to interview them shortly.
- 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. We have asked the Social Prescribing Network and the National Association for Link Workers to promote the questionnaire to its members. If you are in a link worker role in the UK and would like to complete the questionnaire, please contact Stephanie Tierney for a copy (stephanie.tierney@phc.ox.ac.uk).

National and international stakeholder meetings, February 2021

On 24th and 25th February, we met with stakeholders. They included international cultural sector delegates, and older adults and link workers from the UK. It was a great opportunity to inform them about the progress of the research and to receive feedback on our findings and the programme theory. This feedback informed elements of our realist review and raised important issues to explore during research interviews with cultural sector staff and older adults. Here is a brief overview of the feedback.



Day 1 – discussion with international stakeholders from the cultural sector

On day 1, we met with cultural sector representatives from several countries (America, Australia, the UK, Hong Kong, Denmark and Norway) to discuss the outcomes of our realist review. Important feedback was offered on:

- The need for funding to support cultural institutions engaging in social prescribing, and to understand the key role that cultural institutions play within the community as spaces for reflection, conviviality, and social integration.
- The value of tailoring activities (e.g. with staff and older people) depending on different contexts and circumstances, while also trying new things.
- 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).
- 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 long-term effects of Covid-19 on confidence among older people in joining in-person activities, with concerns about safety.

Day 2 – discussion with older adults and link workers

On day 2, we met with older people and link workers from around the UK to discuss our initial findings. Following an incredibly rich discussion, here is some of the feedback we received:

- Being mindful of the diversity of older people, who have different needs. Therefore, it is important to have a wide range of offers.
- In order for a space to be more welcoming, it is imperative that the venue is accessible. This includes, but is not limited to, wheelchair access, signs with appropriate font, having lifts or elevators, easy access to toilets or other facilities.
- While having digital offers provides opportunities to reach people who may feel forgotten, digital poverty (e.g. not having access to a computer or wi-fi) is a significant challenge that needs to be considered when designing programmes for well-being. Also not all older people will feel comfortable using digital technologies.
- Communication about offerings is just as significant as the activities themselves because it can be difficult for link workers and older people to find out about what is available.

Project partners meeting, March 2021

On 31st March, we met with our AHRC project partners to discuss the progress of the realist review and the dissemination strategy for our project. The project partners provided highly valuable feedback and advice on these matters. Some key advice concerned:

- The essential nature of outreach to connect with communities less represented among cultural sector programmes, and to help people adopt 'something new' as part of a social prescribing.
- The importance of language used in outreach activities and documents depending on the audience, to ensure that the cultural offer makes sense.
- The importance for referrers (e.g. GPs, link workers) to understand the offer so they feel confident to prescribe it to older people.
- Positive feedback on 'holding' as a component of our programme theory indicating the significance of establishing a relationship between cultural sector staff and older people.

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.

Stay in touch

If you would like any more information about this project, please see our [project page](#) or do not hesitate to contact:

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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.

