

Ways to Wellbeing and LAC Blog for LAC National Network

The power of the relationships between Social Prescribing and Local Area Coordination in York – a blog by Jennie Cox and Jasmine Howard

Jasmine Howard is the manager of the Ways to Wellbeing Social Prescribing service in York. Jennie Cox is a Local Area Coordinator working in the same area of the city as Jasmine. Ways to Wellbeing has been operating in York for nearly two years, the Local Area Coordination was rolled out in York just over a year ago. When Jasmine and Jennie heard about the lack of cohesion of these approaches in other areas they were keen to share their reflections about how well they have worked together.

The wider context in York and cultural shifts

Jennie reflects – Local Area Coordination and Social Prescribing have evolved side by side over the last year in York at a time of shared vision and action. The groundwork had been set for a real culture shift within not just the Council and services but the wider community before I came in to post. Mine and Jasmine's roles play an important part in that. The approaches encourage a bigger picture way of thinking and the flexibility to work with individuals and families in the way that suits them and values their strengths and the strengths of others in their community.

Jasmine reflects – Jennie works in a defined geographical area with introductions coming from a range of people and places. I am based within primary care in the East of the city so receive referrals from a smaller base within a bigger area. Our work is therefore targeted in different ways. Between us, I think our reach is wide.

I have introduced people to Jennie when having a longer term relationship with someone has been important in building a positive vision for the future. But how we work together is bigger and more difficult to quantify than introductions and co-working, it is about culture. For me, the arrival of a new Head of Commissioning (Early Intervention, Prevention & Community Development) and Local Area Coordination brought with it a real culture shift from within the Council and across the city. This supportive context helped me feel more supported working in social prescribing. The environment has been such an important factor in how Jennie and I work together. We have never been pitted against each other but in contrast have been part of each other recruitment processes, have managers on each other's steering groups and have had shared training opportunities. Time has been spent articulating

to others where Local Area Coordination and Social Prescribing both sit in prevention. From the beginning the conversation has been around how we are better together.

Jennie reflects – The introduction of the Local Area Coordination programme has really benefited from the positive links already forged with the CVS. This gave us a strong ally in Jasmine, and the rest of her team as this expanded. We have widened these positive joint working practices to the development of a ‘Practitioners Forum’ which welcomes other services with social prescribing or community connection functions to meet regularly to share good practice and offer invaluable peer support. We are often asked if there is an overlap or duplication in our work, however we have forged such smart ways of working in co-production that I couldn’t now imagine one without the other.

Jasmine adds to this – Jennie and I meet on a regular basis with other colleagues for peer support. This works so well, I think largely because we share the same values – being collaborative, person centred and strengths based. These meetings are a chance to share knowledge, skills and experience, to come up with creative solutions but also to have a coffee and get to know each other as people. This friendliness helps with cohesion. We all share spirit and pride in what we are doing. The power of relationships and the practicalities of co-production

Jasmine reflects – Local Area Coordination and Social Prescribing are both new ventures in York. There’s been a lot to learn and I feel we have done some of this together. Jennie and I have talked a lot about the volunteering pathway within Social Prescribing as well as some of the other resources we have access to. I have found Jennie a great person to think outside the box with. We’ve had honest conversations about things we’ve set up that haven’t gone to plan so we can both learn from this.

Both Local Area Coordination and Social Prescribing approaches consciously spend time building community connections. Jennie and I have worked together to build and maintain relationships, inviting people to our peer support meetings, meeting people together and knowing each other’s roles well enough to put each other in touch with others.

Jennie reflects – Jasmine has provided an important link to health services which has facilitated collaborative working to produce better outcomes for the people I have been walking alongside. On a more personal note Jasmine is someone who is always at the other end of the phone and happy to talk through any situation with and will always ask ‘is there anything I can do to

help?’ We offer each other regular informal peer support and I feel our strong working relationship provides a good example to others in health and social care. We have supported each other when faced with challenges in the system and strived to join up resources to fill gaps in provision we have identified in the local area.

An example of an individual in our area who we have both worked with:

SB came in to contact with Jasmine through his GP as he was struggling with complex long term health conditions, physical and mental. He was homeless at the time but linked to appropriate housing services. Jasmine discussed his strengths and interests with him, discovering his love of music. She linked him to a ‘Musication’ programme at a local community group, Tang Hall Smart, where he flourished and formed a band with other group members. Through this connection to the community he was introduced to his Local Area Coordinator, Jennie. SB had fallen out of the housing system after an intentional homeless decision had been made and was living in a tent with deteriorating health conditions. Jennie helped him explore options around his housing and finances. Jennie contacted Jasmine to gain context of the previous situation and health information which helped to better inform options. SB now has a permanent bed in a hostel, a keyworker and a referral to a housing scheme which is his preference as it is linked to his local church. He is awaiting a decision from a PIP application. SB is keen to participate in his community and contribute in any way he can, connecting others to available services and groups. At a recent event as part of the Festival of Ideas in York, Jasmine presented regarding Social Prescribing and invited SB’s band to play. Jennie came along to support the event. SB told Jasmine excitedly the week before ‘Jennie’s coming too’. At the end of the event SB said a few words and reflected on the ways Jasmine, Jennie and Tang Hall Smart all had a positive impact on his life.

The common thread through all of these reflections is positive relationships and how powerful these can be when they work well – working together really does work better – on all levels.

Abbreviations

GP- General Practitioner

LAC – Local Area Coordination

York CVS- York Community Voluntary Services