

MHCLG Community Champions Programme Case Study

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Name of scheme:

One Slough Wellbeing Friends

Local area(s) covered:

Slough

Contact details:

Kinder Bassi, Senior Social Prescribing Link Worker / Slough Carers Support,
Slough CVS (Council for Voluntary Service)
kinder@sloughcvs.org.uk

How does this scheme support your local COVID-19 response? Are there other priorities for your champions?

This work was set up very quickly in April 2020 as a response to the need for people to shield and self-isolate at home. It is designed to lessen feelings of social isolation and promote wellbeing amongst people who are unable to leave their homes. It also enabled us to reinforce the latest government advice re: COVID-19 and link residents into other services that could help support their wellbeing and lessen their isolation.

How did the scheme come about? When did it first come about?

The work was set up in April 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to 'lock down' residents. Many people were forced to stay indoors alone with no social contact or support. We initially set this up as a short-term project in response to what was happening, matching volunteers (later called wellbeing friends) to clients who could make phone calls. It quickly became apparent however that the service being provided was highly valued by residents and had positive impacts on their wellbeing. As such, we decided to embed it into our wellbeing support offer (part of our social prescribing service), and it subsequently developed into the current Wellbeing Friends Service.

The Service ensures that individuals have social contact and that their basic needs (including around access to food and medication) are met. It has also helped to pick up safeguarding issues, including around neglect, modern slavery, cuckooing and



self-neglect / self-harm, enabling us to protect clients and alert appropriate authorities where necessary.

Please briefly describe your local population. Does your scheme target any specific population groups?

Slough is a large town in Berkshire (about 20 miles west of London) with a very diverse population of circa 164,000 people. The population is one of the most ethnically diverse outside of London (46% white, 40% Asian, 9% Black, 3% Mixed, 2% Other) with just over 70% speaking English as their first language. Over 41% of the population identify as Christian, over 23% as Muslim, over 10% Sikh and over 6% as Hindu. Slough also has a relatively young population, with over 26% being under 18 and just under 10% being between 18 and 25. It has a vibrant and diverse voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector that reflects the diversity of the area.

In the most recent indices of multiple deprivation data¹ Slough is ranked as the 53rd most deprived out of 151 local authority areas. Just over 76% of people aged 16-64 are in employment in Slough (same as the national average) and it has an economic activity rate of 21.5% (slightly above the national average of 20.6%). Average weekly earnings are £520.30 compared to a national average of £474.40. 12.8% of the population live in overcrowded households (compared to a national average of 4.8%) and 7.6% of households are classed as being in temporary accommodation (compare to a national average of 3.8%). Life expectancy (male: 79.1, female: 82.7) and healthy life expectancy (male: 58.1, female: 59.8) are lower than the national average (LE - male: 79.8, female: 83.4; HLE – male: 63.2, female: 63.5).

All of our clients are adults (age 18+) who are classified as vulnerable due to their physical and / or mental health and care /support needs.

How does the scheme work? Which organisation or groups are involved?

This work is managed by Slough CVS (a registered charity and company limited by guarantee) and is part of the One Slough Community Partnership. One Slough is a collaboration between health, the local authority and the community and voluntary sector, to enable a quick coordinated response to the needs of the residents of Slough. Partners meet on a weekly basis to consider the latest information (e.g. on COVID-19 infection rates) and ensure a coordinated response that minimises gaps in service provision and that keeps residents protected and informed. The Wellbeing Friends Service has a Service Lead who is supported by both the Wellbeing Prescribing Service Lead and the Volunteer Coordinator.

The purpose of the Service is to make regular calls to vulnerable and isolated adults. It was set up during the first 'lockdown' and has continued successfully since. Clients can be referred to the service through a number of routes, including via their GP, adult social care, VCSE organisations and the local COVID-19 Call Centre. They can also self-refer.



Each client is assessed by a wellbeing prescriber from our Wellbeing Prescribing Service and, if a need is identified for social interaction, then the client is matched to a wellbeing friend. This matching considers factors such as language needs, gender preference and interests.

The wellbeing friend will call the client up to three times a week, with each call lasting around twenty minutes (based on the client's needs). After each call, the wellbeing friend will make notes and send these to the Wellbeing Friend Service Lead on a weekly basis. If there are any concerns, including around safeguarding, these are reported immediately to the wellbeing prescribers and, where appropriate, the wellbeing friend is informed of the outcome.

Our aim was initially to keep people involved in meaningful conversations to support their wellbeing, as well as making sure they were safe and that they had access to food and medication. We created links with groups who were able to support our clients with shopping, medication, and food delivery through the One Slough Community Partnership. Wellbeing friends also have a good understanding of what other groups and resources are available to clients and will encourage and support them to access these, with the overall aim of engaging clients in the wider community to lessen feeling of isolation.

We have started to offer clients the opportunity to meet with other clients via online facilitated zoom sessions and actively encourage them to join other online events with trusted sources.

As a team, we continue to work with the wider community and to offer our clients support in a holistic way. The Wellbeing Friends Service is now being integrated with other local projects, including: -

- Carers Support Service - our support structure for carers groups and networks that want to run activities, lunch clubs and sessions to promote wellbeing and carers rights
- Wellbeing App - a new initiative that allows residents to find local groups and services that are relevant to them and their wellbeing from their phone
- Thriving Communities Project – this work is designed to increase social connectedness and help communities (especially ethnic minority communities that have been most impacted) cope with the impact of COVID-19

How are champions recruited?

We asked local residents (through a call out) to come help with One Slough's community response to COVID-19, by volunteering their time and skills. To date, we have received a response from over 1,500 individuals.

Out of this number, we have recruited over 650 community champions, who have a role around engaging with their local communities and ensuring that important messages are disseminated to those who need to hear them. These champions



come from all walks of lives (including community and faith leaders) and are representative of the communities that we serve. They come together on a fortnightly basis to receive briefings from colleagues in both public health and healthcare, that include up to date information, intelligence and guidance to disseminate within their communities.

We have also recruited some of our wellbeing friends from the pool of volunteers who responded to the initial call out. Others have been recruited via a partnership with a local college (<https://www.windsor-forest.ac.uk/langley-college.html>), which has enabled health and social care students to become wellbeing friends and contribute as part of their work experience placements. This supported the students to complete their studies and gain practical experience, whilst also providing the community with much needed support. We have also tapped into existing networks and volunteers (e.g. those involved in faith groups at local mosques, gurdwaras and churches) where possible as part of our recruitment. Where existing volunteering opportunities have been curtailed due to COVID, we have been able to offer a role to those who still want to help. We currently have 40 wellbeing friends, speaking 14 different community languages, including Urdu, Arabic, Punjabi, Gujrati, Hindi and Romanian.

Further to this and with the aim of maximising our reach and impact, we promote all volunteering opportunities through social media, newsletters, websites (including the Slough Get Involved Database) and local press, e.g. we are using a local radio station aimed at ethnic minority communities to get important messages out and promote volunteering opportunities. Regular good news stories also help to keep the profile of the work high and, during Wellbeing Week, we focused on our Wellbeing Service and how it helps local communities, whilst also taking the opportunity to thank our wellbeing friends. This in turn helped to generate yet more interest in the wellbeing friends, thus further helping us continue to meet the needs of our communities.

Recruitment of wellbeing friends is managed by our Volunteer Coordinator, who ensures that they are recruited from all parts of the community and that the language and cultural needs of our clients can be met. Many clients prefer to have conversations in their first language, especially as they get older or experience ill health, and we ensure that our wellbeing friends can meet this need. Over 50% of our wellbeing friends come from an ethnic minority background and this is representative of the wider diversity that makes up Slough. Currently, wellbeing friends do not receive reimbursement for their role.

How are champions trained and supported?

Wellbeing friends are sent videos on safeguarding and befriending as a part of the onboarding process and, once recruited, are given an induction by the Service Lead. They are then invited to undertake volunteer passport training, which includes content on safeguarding, communication skills, boundaries, confidentiality and equality & diversity. A training log is kept for each wellbeing friend, and those that



are unable to undertake the volunteer passport training are instead invited to join befriending training, which is an abridged and focused version of this.

Other training available to all volunteers, including wellbeing friends includes content on conflict resolution, first aid, mental health awareness / first aid, diabetes awareness, conflict management and self-care.

Wellbeing friends receive supervision once a quarter with the Wellbeing Friends Service Lead and there are also opportunities for peer support. Supervision touches on any challenges in the role, training needs, wellbeing support and any suggestions around service improvement.

The Wellbeing Team also provides a weekly out of hours support service, which ensures that wellbeing friends working with clients who prefer contact in the evening are able to do this and receive the necessary support (e.g. around any safeguarding concerns).

How do you engage and communicate with champions?

Wellbeing friends receive weekly updates by e-mail, which include information on training / other opportunities to get involved, upcoming Zoom socials and dates for peer support / supervision. There are also weekly opportunities to meet and socialise, although these have recently been paused as the volunteer that facilitates them has stepped back (we are actively recruiting a replacement).

Has the scheme been evaluated in any way?

We have used case studies and client feedback to help evaluate the Wellbeing Friends Service. The Service was set up at pace and, now that things are returning to normal, we are looking at ways of capturing outcomes related to wellbeing and the number of our clients that go onto access other services. Prior to COVID, we used the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index ⁱⁱ in our volunteering work and we are looking to reinstate this.

What outcomes has the scheme led to?

Since the Wellbeing Friends Service was established, we have engaged with 74 volunteers, who have supported over 250 clients. Wellbeing friends have made over 4,000 calls between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021. We currently have 40 wellbeing friends, supporting around 81 clients a week.

A small sample of client feedback and testimonials are given below: -

“Really grateful, she is the only one I talk to on a regular basis, and I look forward for her calls. She made Slough safer for me encouraging me to go out and explore different areas” S.M

“It’s been great, my wellbeing friend’s help and my wellbeing prescriber’s help who put me in touch with other organizations. It’s helpful for my mental health to talk to somebody regularly” J.W

“I love it, I got somebody to talk to, connect to and understands me” P.M

“The best thing my Wellbeing Friend did for me is accepting me for who I was” S.H

We also have some video testimonials, which are linked to below: -

- From Roxana (Service Lead) - <https://youtu.be/WUGtsoAMpqs>
- From Jagmit (Wellbeing Friend) - <https://youtu.be/zTYMpOq8QR4>

What has been your key learning from the scheme to date?

The scheme was set up very quickly in response to COVID-19 and some of our key learning has been around just how amazing and unselfish our local residents are. They came forward to help in large numbers and persevered with the recruitment process which, because of its engagement with clients with care and support needs, involved DBS and identity checks. There has been a genuine interest amongst our local communities in helping and supporting each other through difficult times.

Through this work, we have come to understand how connecting people can have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. It has also been important to ensure that specific outcomes were embedded in the service to prove its value from the onset.

How are you planning to develop your scheme moving forward?

The service has now been integrated into our Wellbeing Service and will continue to be integrated into other existing projects and wellbeing work, including our Thriving Communities Project, our Wellbeing App and the Slough Carers Support Service.

We are hoping to expand the service to include face to face meetings and allow wellbeing friends to escort clients to activities that they would otherwise be too nervous to attend. We also hope (COVID permitting) to expand group activities to allow clients to ease each other’s feelings of isolation.

We would like to put in place further monitoring to demonstrate the value of the service, to survey clients on how they would like to see the service develop and, funding permitting, to increase the number of clients we can support.

Links to any further information

- Slough Carers Support <https://sloughcarerssupport.co.uk/>
- One Slough Volunteering <https://oneslough.org.uk/volunteer/>



- Slough Wellbeing Prescribing Service <https://sloughcvs.org/wellbeing-prescribing/>
- Slough Get Involved <https://slough.communitydatabase.co.uk/>
- Slough Thriving Communities Project <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/thriving-communities/>
- One Slough Community Response <https://oneslough.org.uk/covid19/>
- Video Thank You for Volunteers Week <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQIKmPJU6ZY>

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Author(s):

- Kinder Bassi, Senior Social Prescribing Link Worker / Slough Carers Support, Slough CVS (Council for Voluntary Service)

QA:

- Tom Mapplethorpe, Programme Support Manager, Public Health England
- Lisa Binns-Sykes, Senior Policy Lead, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

For any further information on this collection of case studies or to make a submission, please contact Tom Mapplethorpe, Programme Support Manager, Public Health England – tom.mapplethorpe@phe.gov.uk.

ⁱ Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. English indices of deprivation 2019. Available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

ⁱⁱ Topp et al. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: a systematic review of the literature. *Psychother Psychosom.* 2015;84(3):167-76. doi: 10.1159/000376585. Epub 2015 Mar 28.