



◀ Members of the StreetGames project

who are socially excluded, especially those who are female, have a disability or are from a black, Asian or minority ethnic or LGBTQ background.

The idea is to help them improve their health and well-being by connecting them with local, non-clinical services in the community, which could be run by the local authority or a charity.

After four to six conversations with a link worker, the young people are hooked up to community services such as sport and activities, volunteering, counselling and peer support. They can also receive help with housing, employment and education.

StreetGames' head of health Paul Jarvis-Beesley says: 'We have the first young people coming through the system right now, but they are not just coming through primary care and GPs, as mostly happens with adult social prescribing. Young people don't always go to seek help from their GP in the way that adults do.'

'Often they will present problems to their sports coach, youth worker or college or school nurse. In many cases we are getting referrals from child and adolescent mental health services or youth offending teams.'

Link workers

Once referred to the scheme the young person is assessed by a link worker who, in a series of up to six meetings, will discuss what help would be most appropriate.

Mr Jarvis-Beesley says the project is much-needed: 'Mental health and well-being services for young people are hugely under-invested.'

'I think it's one fifteenth of the money that goes to adults, and there are huge waiting lists even if you can get over the threshold

How social prescribing can help young people

The StreetGames charity offers activities and support for vulnerable young people who have been socially excluded



Anne Horner is a health writer

Among efforts to ease pressure on the NHS by steering people towards community activities, the charity StreetGames is well-placed to help.

It was one of 23 organisations to receive a share of £4.5 million funding from the Department of Health and Social Care at the end of last year for social prescribing – the idea that medicine alone is not always a solution and patients can be helped by signposting them to advice or social activities.

StreetGames – its credo is 'changing sport, changing communities, changing

lives' – was asked to set up the first social prescribing scheme exclusively for young people.

The £500,000-plus share of the funds provided to StreetGames, which performs its mission through local partners with community knowledge, is being used to provide activities and support for 200 vulnerable young people in each of four city areas and pay for four link workers in those areas.

The scheme, beginning in Brighton and Hove, Luton, Sheffield and Southampton, will run until March 2021. It aims to support young people who find it hard to access health services, focusing on 5 to 25 year olds



Social prescribing offers options and support rcni.com/social-prescribing

for mental health services, which is very high.

'A lot of young people don't get referred for support because their problem is not considered severe enough or ingrained enough, and they get booted back out. Even if they do get over the bar they have to wait six months or a year to actually see someone.'

Socio-economic factors

'One of the things that is most striking for us is that when you look at the statistics and build in socio-economic factors, while it is bad enough for the population as a whole, for young people in deprivation it is three times worse.'

'One in ten young people have a diagnosable mental health condition, but in areas of deprivation it becomes three young people in ten instead of one.'

Since the funding was announced last year a fifth scheme, run by the London borough of Enfield, has joined the programme.

Enfield is benefiting from StreetGames' expertise and support, but does not receive financial help.

'Young people don't always go to seek help from their GP in the way that adults do'

Paul Jarvis-Beesley

Mr Jarvis-Beesley says this is an important departure and hopes that more areas will follow suit.

'Enfield fund all the delivery locally themselves. By working collectively we can save money – they don't have to start it themselves. They can tap into all the work that we've done.'

'We are excited about that because it shows it is a good idea. Obviously they see there's value in it so they are willing to invest in it.'

'We hope to invite more areas to come on board in the same way as Enfield has done.'

Find out more

Association for Young People's Health (2015) Key Data on Adolescence. tinyurl.com/AYPH-key-data

StreetGames (2019) Fit and Fed Campaign. www.streetgames.org

The Children's Society - The Good Childhood Inquiry. tinyurl.com/TCS-good-childhood



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Ratio of young people with diagnosable mental health condition

(Source: Children's Society)

33%

of people visiting emergency departments each year are aged 15-19

(Source: Association for Young People's Health 2015)

'It reaches out to a wider community'

Nicole Inckle, one of the link workers appointed by StreetGames, works at the YMCA Downlink Group, part of the Brighton and Hove Wellbeing Service. So far she has had 30 young people referred to her who experience social isolation, depression or social anxiety.

She says: 'A typical referral is someone who cannot leave home, someone with a mild-to-moderate mental health condition who is struggling at school or with the family dynamic, and there are behavioural issues in the home.'

Social prescription gives the young people time to explore their needs through discussions with the link worker, she says.

Young people's needs

'It's about looking at what the young person needs and what's available in the local area. I wanted this role because it reaches out to a wider community. This is so worthwhile.'

She meets young people to assess their needs after they have been referred through a triage system involving clinical staff. She undertakes thorough assessments of lifestyle, self-care and symptoms management, as well as work, finances and home and social networks.

'We are not just homing in on one area of their lives but all of them, so it's comprehensive.'

'In the meeting after the assessment we start to put together an action plan. It's collaborative, so we look at ideas together.'

'We start putting forward ideas of what's going to support them. Those could be anything: activities, sports and groups; looking for work or training; making new friends; getting help and advice; or learning new skills.'

Sport on your doorstep

StreetGames, founded in 2007 as an anti-poverty charity, encourages young people in disadvantaged communities to take part in sport activities locally. To do so it works alongside 1,000 local partners.

David White (pictured), who leads the charity's Fit and Fed campaign, which seeks to combat hunger during school holidays, says there was a clear need to reach out to disadvantaged young people.

'Statistics show disadvantaged children and young people are the least active in society,' he says. 'They tend to be put off by traditional methods of delivering sport.'

The charity's key initiative is the Doorstep Sport programme, backed by a £20 million investment from Sport England, a public body under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr White says: 'The methodology is simple: training people to deliver activities in the right place at the right time, and generally free of charge. We will support a youth club that's already on an estate in a community to deliver in their community. What we don't do is parachute anyone in anywhere.'

