

Exploring the Power of Green Social Prescribing to Build Healthier, Connected Communities

A seminar to explore how we can increase connections between people and nature to improve health and wellbeing



Reflections on Nurture through Nature

Nicholas Buxton

High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, 2025 - 26



A word cloud featuring various terms related to mental health and recovery. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner. The largest words are 'healing', 'participation', 'wellbeing', 'mental health', and 'refuge'. Other prominent words include 'recovery', 'stability', 'neighbourhood', 'discovery', 'volunteering', 'confidence', 'connection', 'exercise', 'family', 'community', 'recovery', 'belonging', 'vitality', 'resilience', 'togetherness', 'learning', and 'low cost'. The colors used for the words are primarily shades of blue, yellow, and red.

stability neighbourhood
hope healing discovery
confidence volunteering
participation
connection exercise
family wellbeing
community recovery
mental health
rehabilitation belonging
resilience refuge vitality
learning recovery togetherness
low cost

The Peace of Wild Things

A poem
by Wendell Berry

The Masonic Fishing Charity

- 8 October
- Rib Valley Lakes and elsewhere
- Lakeside School for Special needs children
- Supported by Angling Trust
- www.mtsfc.org.uk



CultureWood CIC

- 6 July
- Moneyhole Lane Park, WGC
- Forest School
- Serving an area of deprivation
- www.culturewood.co.uk



The Red Shed

- 23 April
- Stevenage
- Dementia care
- For patients and carers
- www.theredshed.garden



Mudlarks

- 23 April
- Hertford
- Communal garden
- Adults with learning disabilities
- www.mudlarksgarden.org.uk



Saplings Begin

- 12 November
- Broxbourne Woods
- Woodland setting
- People with disability
- www.saplingsbegin.com



Woodoaks Farm

- 9 July
- Maple Cross
- Connecting community with nature, food and farming
- 300-acre farm
- Supported by Soil Association
- www.woodoaksfarm.com



Scouts Night Walk

- 27 September
- 1st Stanstead Abbots Scouts
- Preparing young people with skills for life
- www.scouts.org.uk



Mens Shed

- 6 June
- Ware
- Improving wellbeing, reducing loneliness, combating social isolation
- www.waremensshed.org.uk



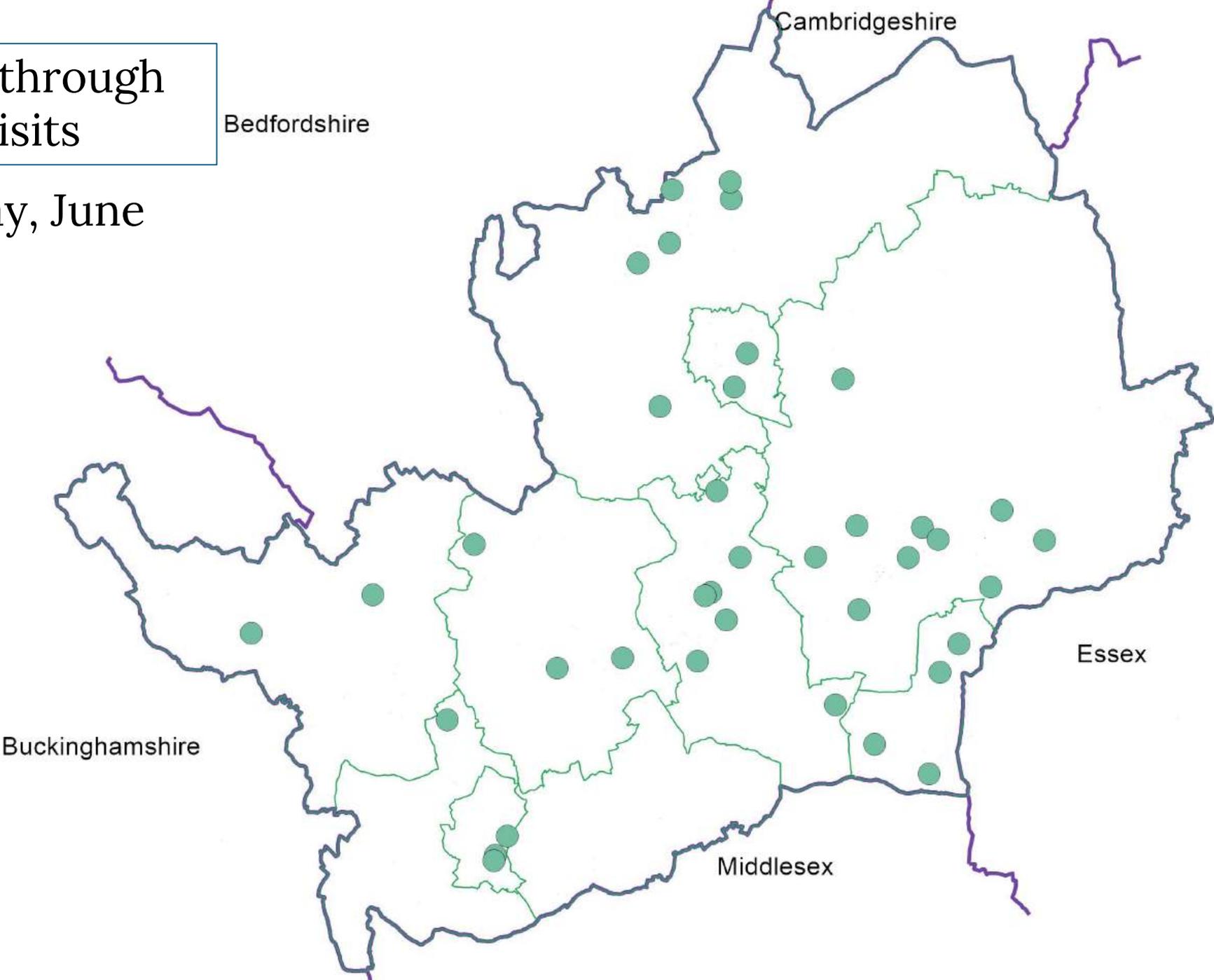
Hertfordshire Health Walks, HCC

- 7 May, at Stevenage FC
- Graded walks to suit all abilities
- Over 70 walks every week
- www.hertfordshire.gov.uk



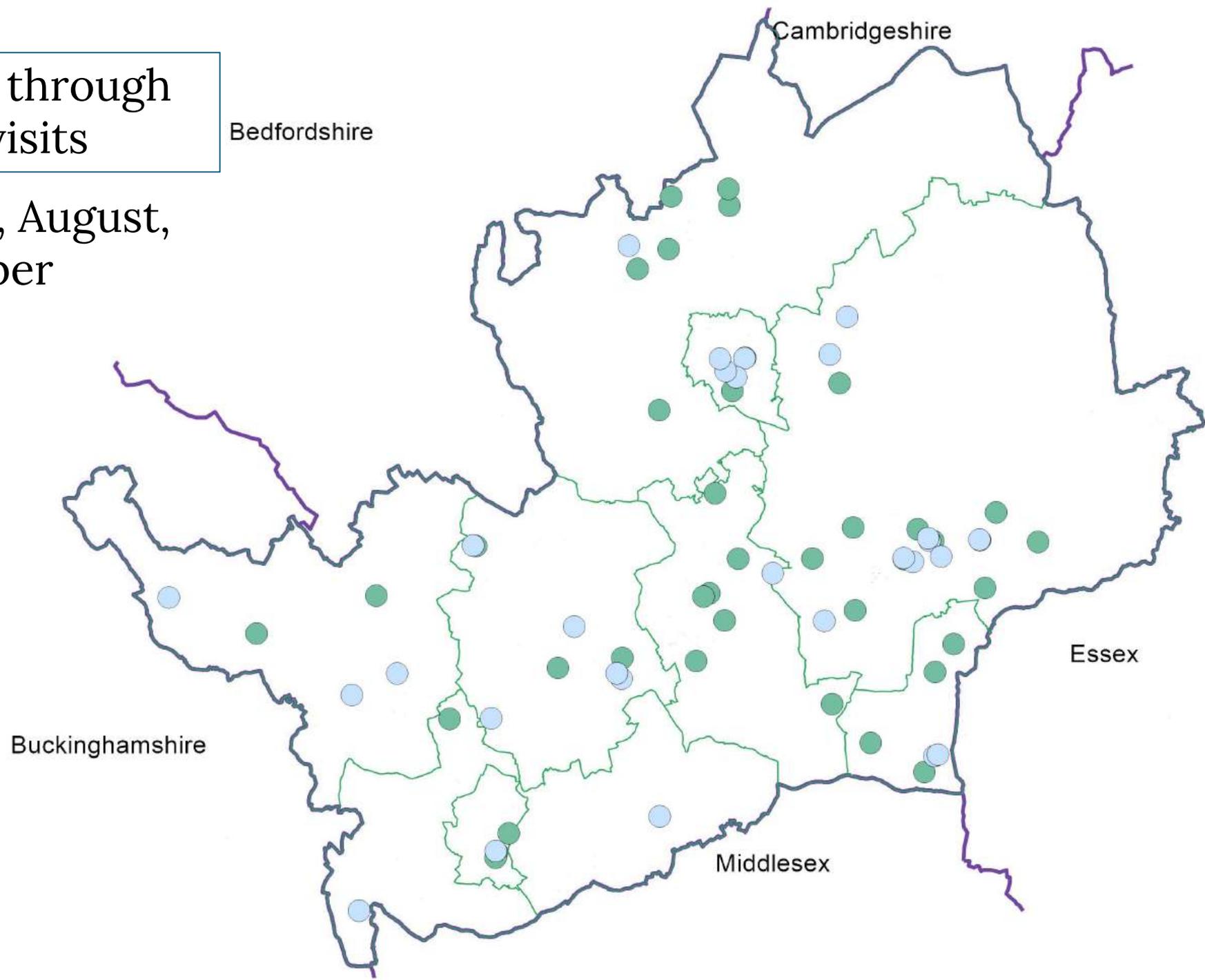
Nurture through
Nature visits

April, May, June



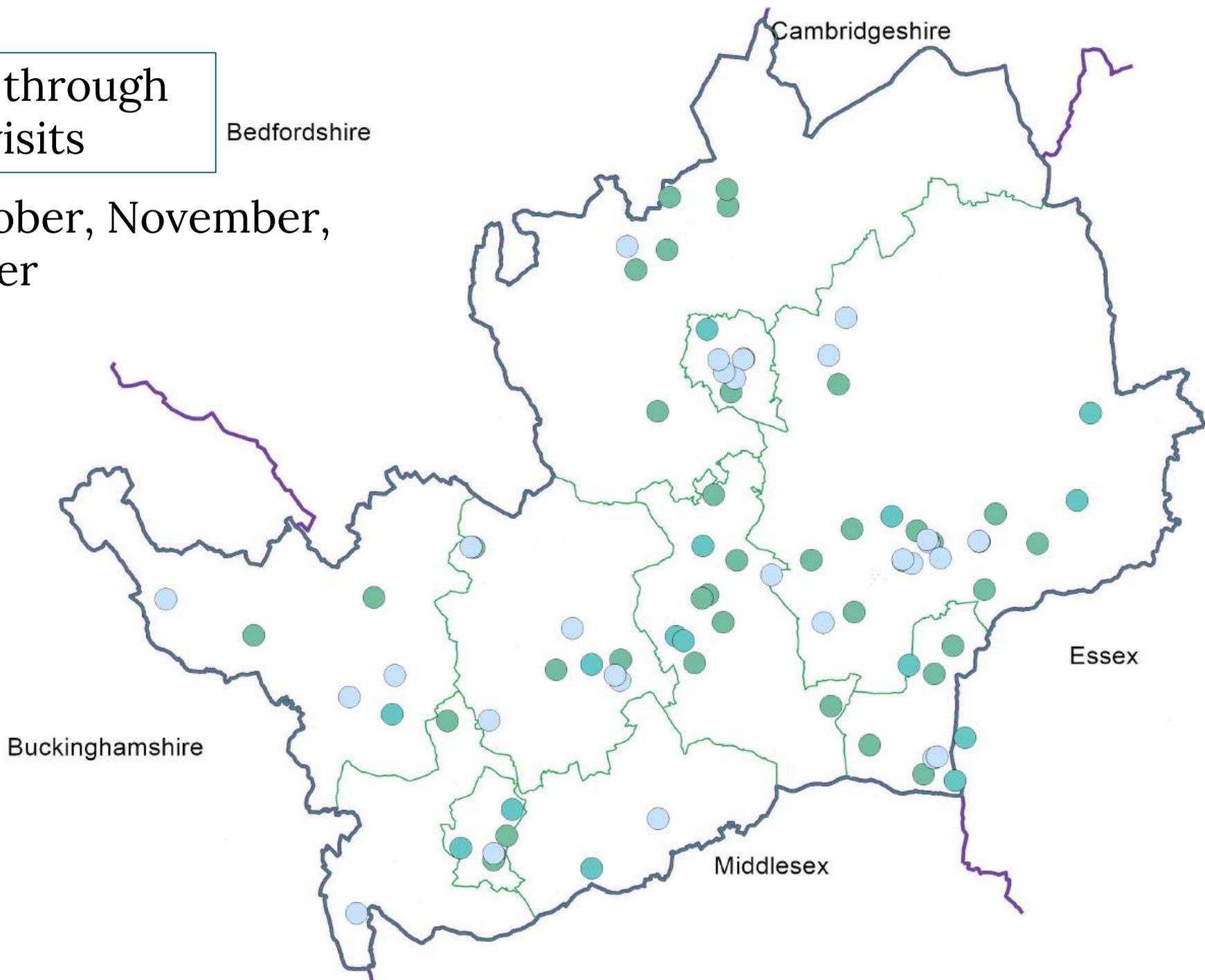
Nurture through
Nature visits

and July, August,
September



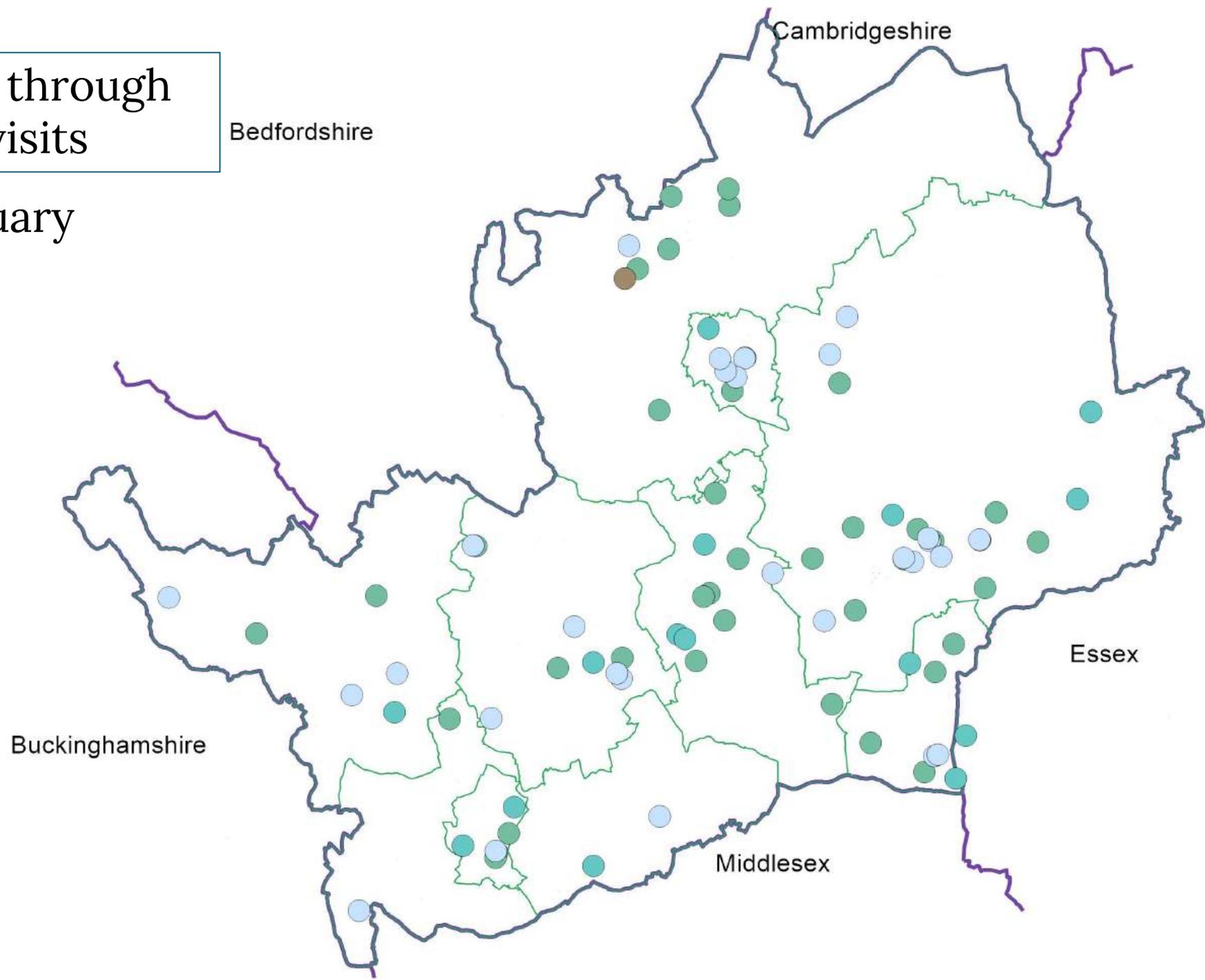
Nurture through
Nature visits

and October, November,
December



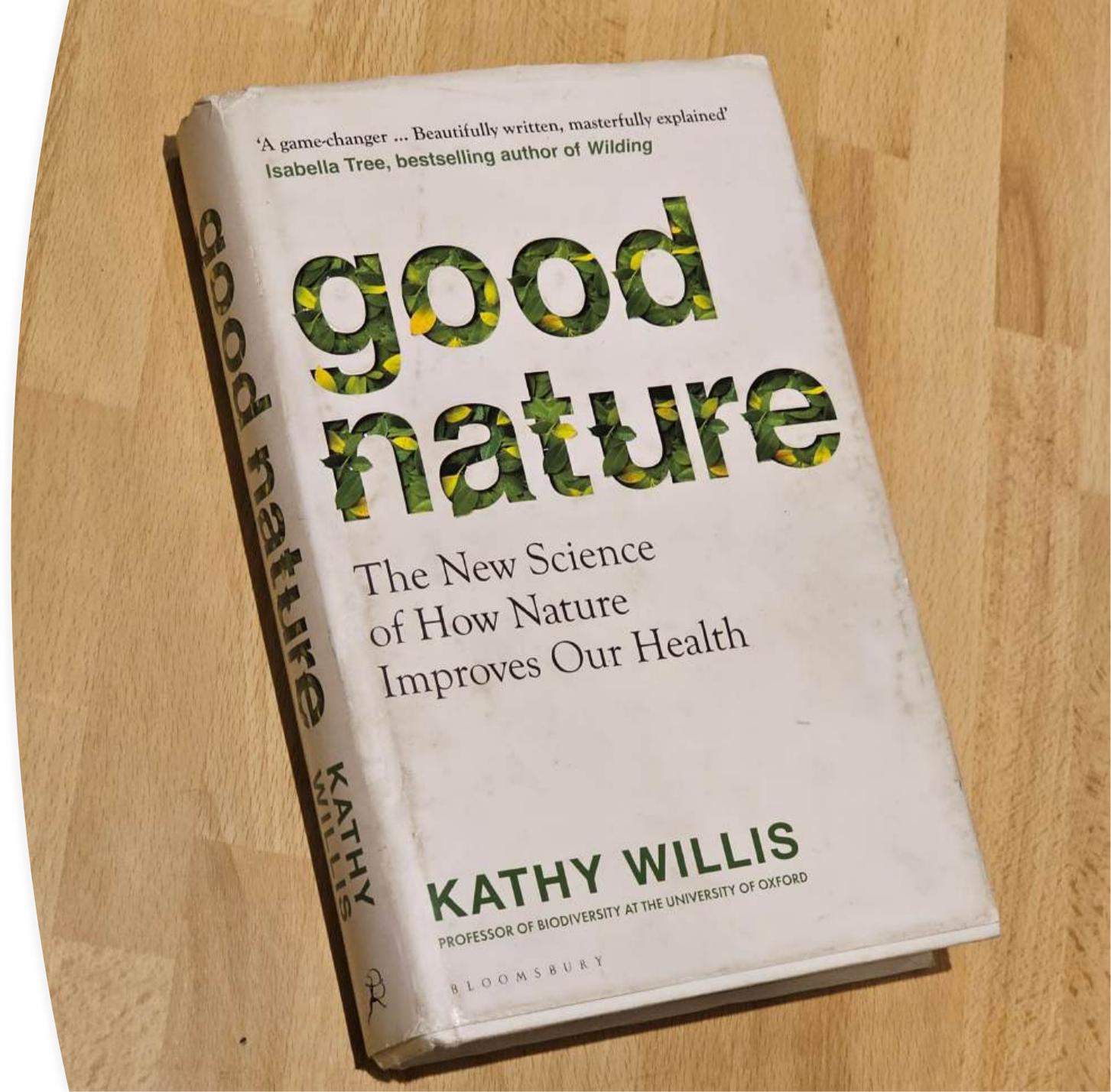
Nurture through
Nature visits

and January



High Sheriff of Hertfordshire Lecture

- *Nurture through Good Nature:*
Experience, Science and routes to
better life outcomes
- Baroness Professor Kathy Willis
- Free lecture at the University of
Hertfordshire
- 16 March 2026



Thank you

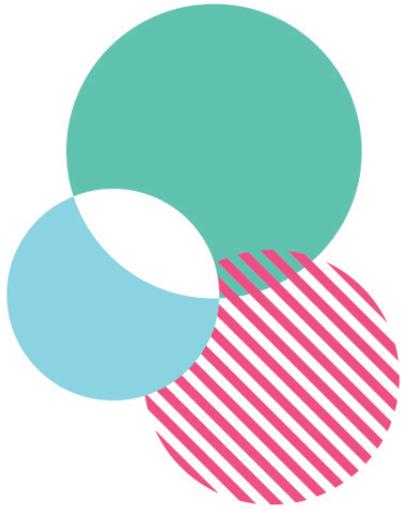
 www.highsheriffofhertfordshire.org.uk

 highsheriff@hsoh.org.uk

 [hertshighsheriff](https://www.instagram.com/hertshighsheriff)

 [HighSheriffofHertfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/HighSheriffofHertfordshire)





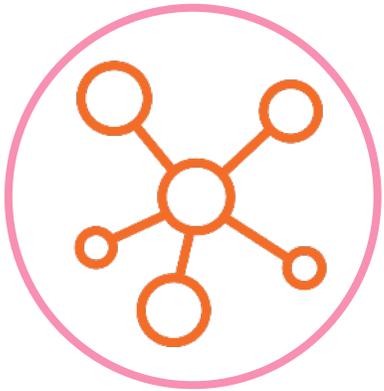
National
Academy
for Social
Prescribing

The National Academy for Social Prescribing: The Power of Green Social Prescribing

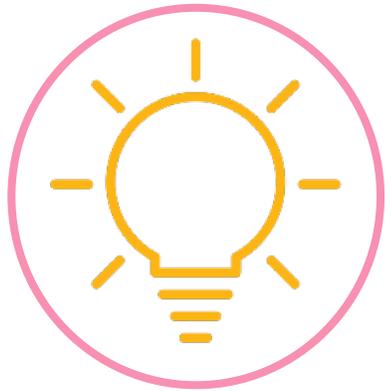
Molly Aldam, National Lead for Natural Environment, NASP
molly.aldam@nasp.info

The National Academy for Social Prescribing

NASP is a national charity that champions social prescribing. We support and connect people, communities and organisations so that more people across the UK can enjoy better health and wellbeing.



Connection



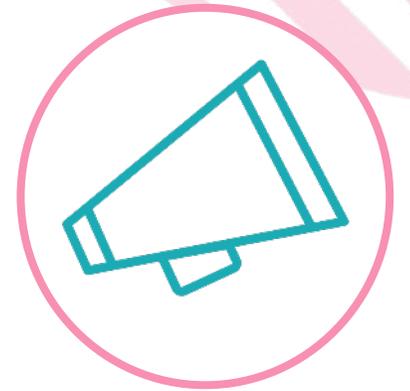
Innovation



Investment



Evidence

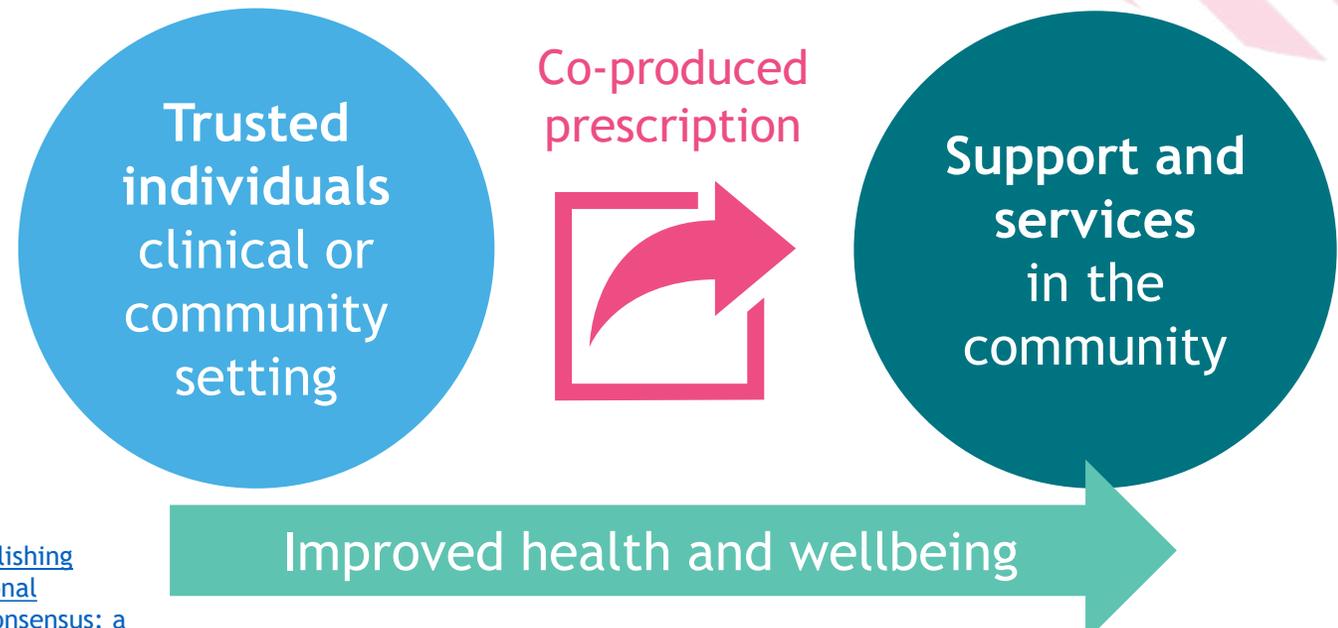


Awareness

What is Social Prescribing?

“A means for trusted individuals in *clinical and community settings* to identify that a person has non-medical, health-related social needs and to subsequently *connect them to non-clinical supports and services within the community* by *co-producing* a social prescription—a non-medical prescription, to improve health and well-being and to strengthen community connections.”

Green Social Prescribing connect people to nature-based interventions e.g. conservation volunteering, walking groups, open water swimming, community gardening, green gyms



Evidence for the benefits of nature-based interventions

- Significant improvements in anxiety, stress and particularly depressive/mood disorders
- Reduced blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, type 2 diabetes, obesity

[Natural England - A narrative review of reviews of nature exposure and human health and well-being in the UK](#)

Comparison of patients with moderate-severe depression given **CBT in forest environment vs CBT in hospital**

Depressive symptoms in Forest CBT group: 15.54 down to 8.04

Depressive symptoms in Hospital CBT group: 15.79 down to 11.58

(Kim et al. 2009)

“Children with ADHD who play regularly in green settings have milder symptoms than children who play in built settings” (Faber Taylor and Kuo 2011)

Social Return on Investment: NBIs can have social and economic benefits worth up to £11.94 return per £1 invested
(Haworth et al. 2025)

Impact of Social Prescribing on Health Service

Evaluation from 9 local health systems across England.

- Social prescribing can substantially reduce pressure on the NHS, including through reduced GP appointments, reduced hospital admissions and reduced A&E visits.
- Reductions in demand for health services were particularly high for frequent service users.
- Social prescribing can have a positive economic impact.

Mid Sussex Healthcare:
25% reduction in GP appointments

Newcastle:
Secondary care cost per patient was 9.4% lower than comparison cohort



The impact of social prescribing on health service use and costs

Examples of local evaluations in practice

November 2024

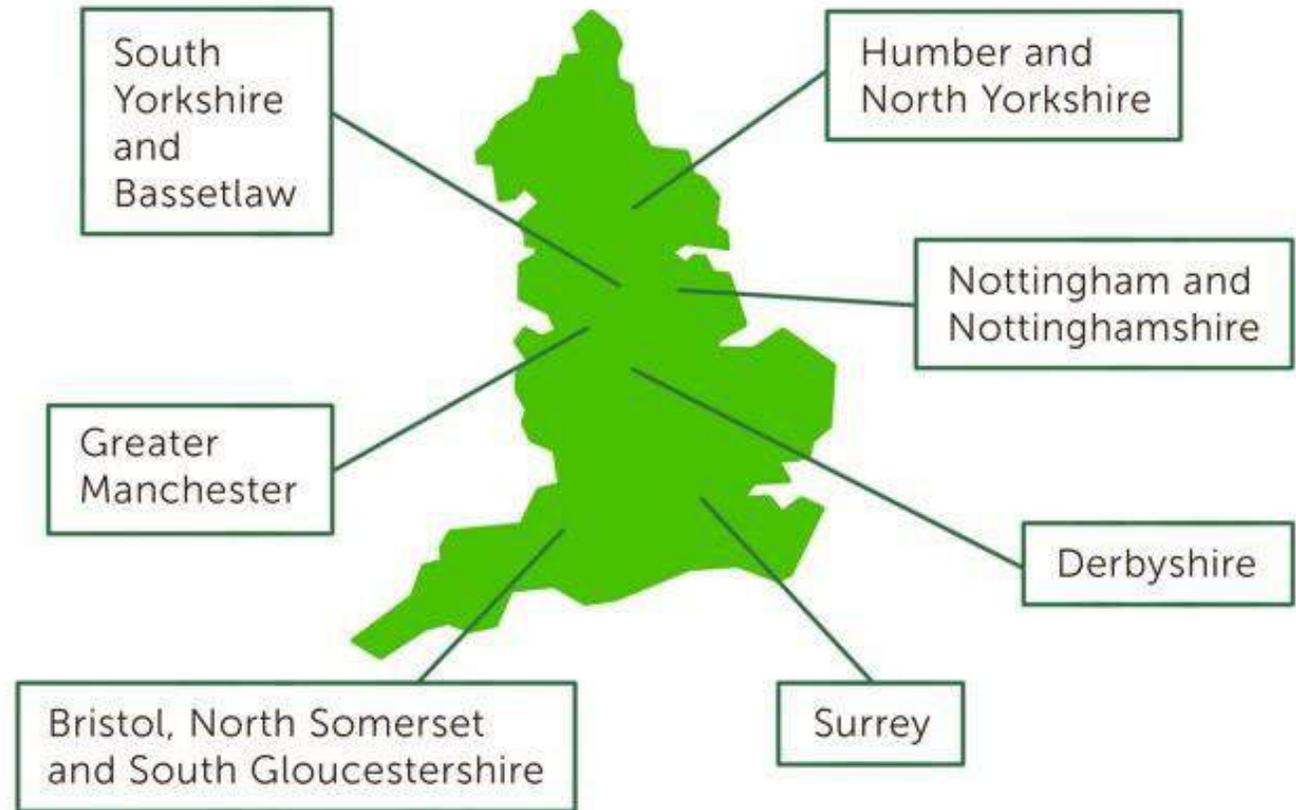


Authors

Dr Elaine O'Connell Francischetto (Lead author), Joelle Brady and Katy Knight - Evidence and Evaluation Team at the National Academy for Social Prescribing.

Cross-Govt Green Social Prescribing Programme to tackle and prevent mental ill health

- £5.77m funded by Treasury and core partners 2021-2023, with £2.3m extension 2024-5
- Aimed to test how mental ill health can be tackled and prevented through green social prescribing
- 7 test and learn sites across England



Green Social Prescribing Programme Evaluation

- **Participant Demographics:**

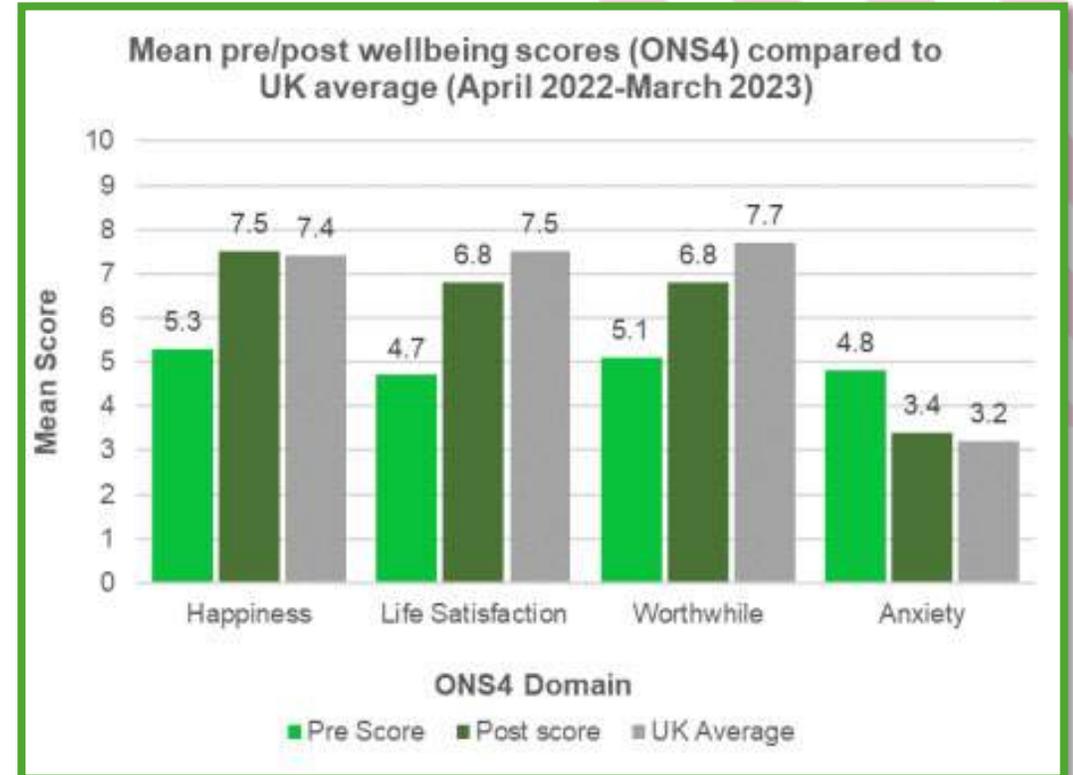
- 8,339 people with mental health needs were supported to access nature-based activities in their local community.
- 57% from socio-economically deprived areas
- 21% from ethnic minority populations

- **Wellbeing Benefits (ONS4):**

- Happiness increased from 5.3 to 7.5 (Nat avg 7.4)
- Life Satisfaction increased from 4.7 to 6.8 (Nat avg 7.5)
- Feeling Life is Worthwhile increased from 5.1 to 6.8 (Nat avg 7.7)
- Anxiety reduced from 4.8 to 3.4 (Nat avg 3.2)

- **Social Return on Investment (SROI):**

- £2.42 per £1 invested by HM Treasury
- More cost-efficient than other mental health interventions e.g., Cognitive Behavioural Therapy



Learnings & recommendations for GSP spread & scale



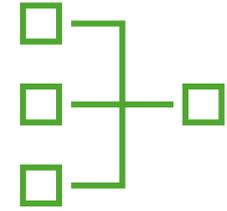
Sustainable Funding & Commissioning



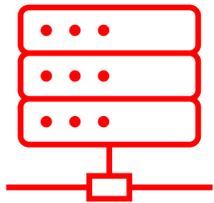
Political & Strategic Support



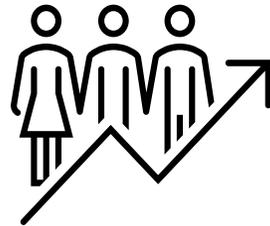
Grow Provider Networks



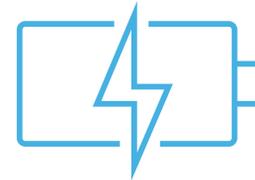
System Alignment & Barriers



Data Flow & Feedback Loops



Shared Accountability & Problem Solving



Building Referrer Capacity



Equity in Access & User Voice

NHS 10 Year Plan & Neighbourhood Health

(1) Hospital to Community

[NHSE Neighbourhood Health guidelines 2025/6](#): Social Prescribing is listed as a function of neighbourhood multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs)

(2) Sickness to Prevention

‘95% of people with complex needs will have an agreed care plan. We will expect all care plans to be co-created with patients and cover their holistic needs, not just treatment’
NASP pushing to ensure sufficient Linkworkers are in post

(3) Analogue to Digital

‘My Care will increasingly link to services outside the NHS - in the voluntary sector, from social enterprises, social care, community groups or local government. It will be a digital social prescriber.’



Department for Work & Pensions

“The Work & Health Programme would initially build from existing provision already available through social prescribers, NHS work initiatives...”

Other DWP programmes including Connect to Work and WorkWell build on local social prescribing systems.

NASP is working in partnership with the Royal College of Occupational Therapists to design a model for the new WHP and support the Vanguards

AUTUMN 2025

**Keep Britain
Working**

Final Report

Towards a Community Health and Wellbeing Fund



National
Academy
for Social
Prescribing

ENVISAGING A SOCIAL PRESCRIBING FUND IN ENGLAND

A report funded by the National Lottery
Community Fund



The National Academy for Social Prescribing
April 2024

NASP worked with Social Finance to co-design a model of shared investment funds to build community capacity:

- Empower local VCFSE organisations and community groups to develop greater community-led decision making in fund management
- Tackle inequalities through effective targeting and distribution of funds
- Leverage local match funding (£1-£1 model)



Create the infrastructure
needed to pool and distribute
public and private money



Give communities more
control over what is delivered
in their neighbourhoods



Enable community-led
partnerships to lead the shift
from hospital-based care to
community-based support.

GSP Innovation Community

- NASP's Innovation Network: free membership platform for SP providers & referrers
- GSP Community equips the GSP workforce with learning from GSP Programme and beyond
- Resource Hub, Forum, Online networking and learning events



Home Get Involved Topic Hubs Training Community

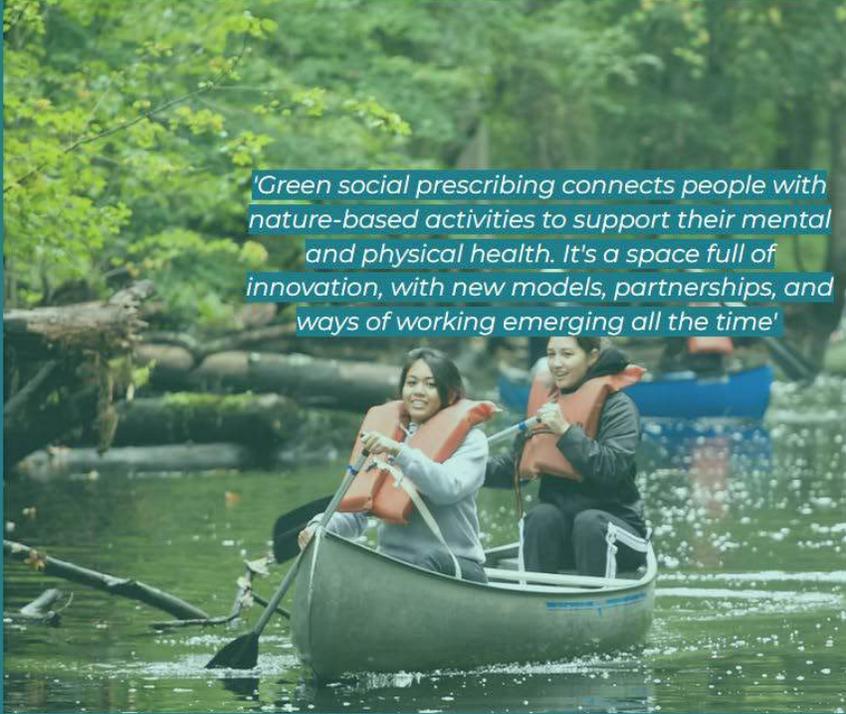
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Green Social Prescribing

This space has been designed to support the scale and spread of Green Social Prescribing. Whether you're just starting out or looking to embed green social prescribing within your system, there's something here for you. Explore our national resource hub including evidence, toolkits and guidance - or join the GSP Innovation Community to get involved, join networking opportunities, and access collaborative spaces to develop and share your work!

Visit Resource Hub

Join The Community

A photograph of two women in a grey canoe on a river, surrounded by lush green trees. They are wearing orange life jackets and smiling.

'Green social prescribing connects people with nature-based activities to support their mental and physical health. It's a space full of innovation, with new models, partnerships, and ways of working emerging all the time'

JOIN OUR ICB SOCIAL PRESCRIBING Community of Practice



This online Community of Practice (CoP) is for those working in Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) who have a role and interest in social prescribing, its commissioning, quality, sustainability, and implementation across communities.



Complete the form to become a member

Or email workforce@nasp.info

<https://forms.office.com/e/mz0XukfnuT>

Our next meeting date:
Tuesday January 27th, 2026
14:00-15:30
Online, via Teams

Social Prescribing Champions

Join a network of over 200 NASP Social Prescribing Champions today to help raise awareness and understanding of social prescribing across the healthcare system!

Champions are individuals who represent both clinical and non-clinical roles across the health system, including:

- GPs & Surgeons
- Allied Healthcare Professionals
- GP Administrators, Clinical Directors
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Personalised Care Roles (SPLWs, Health & Wellbeing Coaches, Care Coordinators)
- Health Commissioners
- Students on placement in a health setting

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)

spchampions@nasp.info



Champion the role of social prescribing in supporting people's health & wellbeing



Raise awareness of social prescribing within your workforce, locality & region



Advocate, promote and share the work of NASP



Support a collaborative, whole system approach to social prescribing



Feedback any local initiatives, case studies & exemplars of social prescribing practice



Commit to a core set of values



Social Prescribing in Hertfordshire

Mark Hanna
CEO, Age UK Hertfordshire

How Social Prescribing Works



- 1. Identification of need for support. Referral sources include GPs, hospitals, social care services, and self-referrals to identify non-medical health needs.
- 2. Person referred to a Social Prescribing Link Worker.
- 3. Holistic assessment to target social determinants like loneliness, financial stress, and housing to improve overall wellbeing.
- 4. Co-create a plan: Tailored activities and services.
- 5. Connection & Follow-up: Link worker supports engagement.
- 6. Outcomes: Improved wellbeing and reduced healthcare demand



Benefits and Challenges

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

BENEFITS

- ✓ Improves mental health & well-being
- ✓ Empowers patients (focus on goals)
- ✓ Reduces pressure on healthcare
- ✓ Strengthens community connections
- ✓ Cost-effective (potential ROI)

CHALLENGES

- Hard to measure social/emotional outcomes
- Requires cultural shift in clinical practice
- Funding and sustainability issues
- Unequal access in rural or deprived areas
- Shortage of trained link workers



Measuring Success

- Patient-reported outcomes: Well-being scores (e.g., WEMWBS).
- Social outcomes: Reduced isolation, volunteering, housing stability.
- Health service metrics: Reduced GP visits, lower medication use.
- Economic impact: Cost savings and ROI.
- Qualitative feedback: Patient stories and testimonials.

Sp Timeline in Herts

- **2011** – Launch of HertsHelp, via POhWER, and Herts Directory re-launches
- **2014** – Community Navigator programme starts in South and West Herts (funded by SWH CCG, hosted by Vol orgs – CiH, WCHT, POhWER, Dacortium)
- **2015** – ‘HertsHelp in the home’ project starts countywide provided by W3RT
- **2017** – Amalgamation of Community Navigator programme, HertsHelp in the home and hospital discharge support service (BRC & Age UK Herts) forms to create the Hospital and Community Navigation Service (HCNS)
- **2019**– NHS Long Term Plan as part of Universal Personalised Care, launch the SPLW programme nationwide for PCN’s – In Herts, some are recruited through HCNS and become part of the HCNS team, other PCN’s opt to employ their own SPLW’s directly
- **2023** – HertsHelp is recommissioned to be delivered by Citizens Advice Stevenage and Age UK Herts
- **2024** – HCNS in recommissioned by existing partnership



Hospital and Community Navigation Service (HCNS)

- **Hospital LW's**

HCNS has teams working with Lister, Watford General and Princess Alexandra hospitals, as well as the community-based hospital throughout Hertfordshire to support patients to be discharged and to reduce the risk of readmission by providing practical SP support

- **Community LW's**

HCNS has teams working in the community who can support anyone who needs help. They work with social care, housing, community health practitioners, other VCFSE orgs, and many more professionals to provide SP support to prevent decline and improve health outcomes.

- **PCN LW's**

These are LW's either reemployed directly by the PCN or via HCNS. They will take referrals from the clinical PCN team and support patients with SP to improve health outcomes

ROLE OF HERTSHELP IN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Central Coordination Hub

HertsHelp acts as a central triage point, managing referrals and providing initial advice for social prescribing.

Holistic Needs Assessment

Focuses on understanding individual needs to deliver personalized support.

Multi-Channel Communication

Offers phone, email, and text support to ensure accessibility for diverse populations.

Streamlined Access and Integration

Serves as a single access point reducing duplication and linking users to community resources effectively. Closely integrated with HCNS for complex SP cases.

Herts Directory Usage

The Herts Directory offers a comprehensive online database to signpost individuals to local community resources independently.



Proactive Social Prescribing



Proactive social prescribing is more than just social prescribing, it goes one step further and identifies targeted groups with unmet needs to offer improved access to social prescribing so no individual goes without the support they require.

Examples include:

- Pathway 0
- Waiting Well
- Veterans
- Macmillan
- Ukraine Response

Case Study 1

Reason for Referral: Alcohol dependent, self neglecting, lost job due to this, patient is lost and frightened, socially isolated and drinks alone at home daily. GP has also referred to CGL

Issues identified:

- Client was drinking 13-14 cans of beer every night and sleeping all day
- Lost parents, was grieving
- No income in place
- No engagement with the GP
- Property was cluttered floor to ceiling with beer cans and boxes, bathroom was inaccessible
- self-neglecting with personal care, not engaging with medical professionals
- Eating badly, sometimes mouldy food due to inaccessibility to kitchen



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Link Worker Support:

- Supported with successful engagement with **CGL**
- Liaised with **GP** which led to a **GP Practice Paramedic** attending to check on his health where client agreed to be immediately admitted into hospital where he stayed for 2 weeks and was encouraged to eat well, wash daily
- Referred to **Care4Freedom** for de-hoarding of property
- Referred for shopping vouchers which were used for new bedding, towels and food.
- The client also received a new fridge as part of the **Household Support Fund**
- Referred to **Citizens Advice** to assist with income assessment which led to a Universal Credit application,
- Liaised with the Job Centre manager on his situation
- Referred for bereavement support

Link worker Feedback:

- Perseverance was key
- Holistic assessment on a complex case – lots of issues to address, Agree to focus on support for alcohol and benefits first.
- By the time this client had gone into hospital LW had managed to build up enough trust for him to consent for the clearance of the property.
- Client is now feeling much improved with a better outlook on life and is focussed on his recovery in a safer and more sustainable setting.

Case Study 2 – Veteran Project

Reason for referral:

- Referral was received from the clients GP practice for emergency support with housing (homelessness), finance, accessing community support, employment and support with mental health.

Issues Identified

- Client had been street homeless for 3 months and was currently sofa surfing with friends but had spent multiple nights in bus stops and receptions.
- He had lost his job due to his declining physical health and was currently not receiving any benefits.
- The client was deemed a ‘high suicide risk’ by his senior mental health team and on multiple occasions voiced that he was ‘done’ and ‘didn’t want to be here anymore’.
- The client had no money for food and was struggling to keep warm over the winter.

Link Worker Support:

- An emergency referral was put into the Royal British Legion for support with hotel costs
- Supported the client with starting a housing application with the council, collecting supporting evidence from GP and mental health teams and scheduling an urgent housing meeting with the local council.
- Applied and was granted a £50 food voucher for the client to be able to eat over the next few days.

- Additional referrals to Shelter, Op Fortitude, Safe Haven Herts Beds Bucks, Veterans aid and the Veterans Charity for housing support and advocacy. A referral to Op Courage was made for the client to provide support for military related PTSD. Crisis numbers and emergency contact information were also provided to the client.
- Set up a meeting with CAB to ensure the correct benefits were being received and applied for PIP.
- Worked with the client to encourage further support from his GP and mental health teams. This resulted in the client feeling confident enough to attend his appointments and ultimately change his medications to something he felt was more effective.
- Referred into Walking with the wounded and the client was able to obtain 3 interviews for remote employment that he would be able to do with his physical disabilities.
- The client moved into his property on Christmas eve and did not have any furniture or basic living requirements. The link worker applied for the 'Household support fund' for the client which was able to provide him with a washing machine, oven and fridge.

Client Feedback:

'I remember being told I was being handed over to you but it would be Monday as it was a weekend. I didn't think much of it. I remember you answering your phone when no one else would and I don't think you realise how big of an intervention that was. Talking through my issues. It undoubtedly saved my life that night. From then on you have been my lifeline and turned my life around. I will forever be grateful for you.'



Key Takeaways & Next Steps

- Social prescribing improves health and wellbeing through community-based support.
- HertsHelp and Herts Directory enable local delivery and seamless referrals.
- HCNS is the commissioned SP service within Herts and work closely with HertsHelp
- NHS has embedded social prescribing nationally as part of Universal Personalised Care.
- SP is only as effective as the community support activities that are available
- Next steps: Expand partnerships, make community support activities sustainable, and promote awareness.

Who is green social prescribing for? Understanding the needs of adults with learning disabilities



Keely Siddiqui Charlick
Chief Executive, Sunnyside Rural Trust



Sunnyside

Rural Trust



Keely Siddiqui Charlick, CEO
WWW.SUNNYSIDERURALTRUST.ORG.UK

Panel discussion

Tony Bradford

Countryside Management Services – Head of Technical Env Advice Services

Louise Smith

parkrun – Hertfordshire parkrun champion

Sarah Perman

Hertfordshire County Council – Director of Public Health

Dave Renouf

Broxbourne Borough Council – Green Spaces Manager

Ricky Kaplan

Mudlarks – CEO

Becky Fincham

The Serge Hill Project for Gardening, Creativity and Health CIC – Director of Programmes

Next steps – taking things forward after today

To make a start, a webpage has been created which includes:

- Signposting to green social prescribing opportunities
- Evidence for green social prescribing
- Resources – NHS Green social prescribing toolkit
- How to get involved



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership. The header includes the logo and navigation links: 'No Limits 2026', 'Get Active', 'Get Support', 'News & Events', and 'About'. The main heading is 'The Impact of Green Social Prescribing', with a sub-headline: 'Discover the evidence for Green Social Prescribing and how you can access or get involved in a local programme'. Below the text is a photograph of four women walking on a path in a park. To the right of the photo is a blue call-to-action box for newsletters, with a 'Subscribe here' button and a 'Funding Newsletter' section that includes links to 'Read our Funding Newsletter' and 'View Funding Opportunities'.