

# SOCIAL PRESCRIBING to choirs and singing groups

a guide for leaders of choirs/singing groups



*connect Social Prescribing patients with great singing opportunities*

# 1. WHAT IS SOCIAL PRESCRIBING?

Part of the NHS Personalised Care programme, Social Prescribing is a way for GPs and local agencies to refer people to a 'Link Worker'. Link Workers give people time, focusing on 'what matters to me' and taking a holistic approach to people's health and wellbeing. They connect people to community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support. Social Prescribing works for a wide range of people, including those:



- with one or more long-term conditions
- who need support with their mental health
- who are lonely or isolated
- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing

The types of community groups that Link Workers might prescribe to depend on the area, but could include creative activities such as art, dance and singing, and physical activities such as walking, football, gardening and fishing. Social prescriptions might also be to services such as debt counselling, housing and other practical support agencies.

***Evidence suggests that a fifth of patients consult with a GP for what is deemed more of a social problem and that less than 10% of what affects health and wellbeing comes from access to healthcare . Social Prescribing seeks to link people with activities and services which are of interest to them and may help to alleviate their symptoms. Link Workers, [usually] housed within GP surgeries, are allocated patients and undergo a process of finding out what people are interested in and match services with those interests and particular health needs.***

[www.socialprescribingnetwork.com](http://www.socialprescribingnetwork.com)

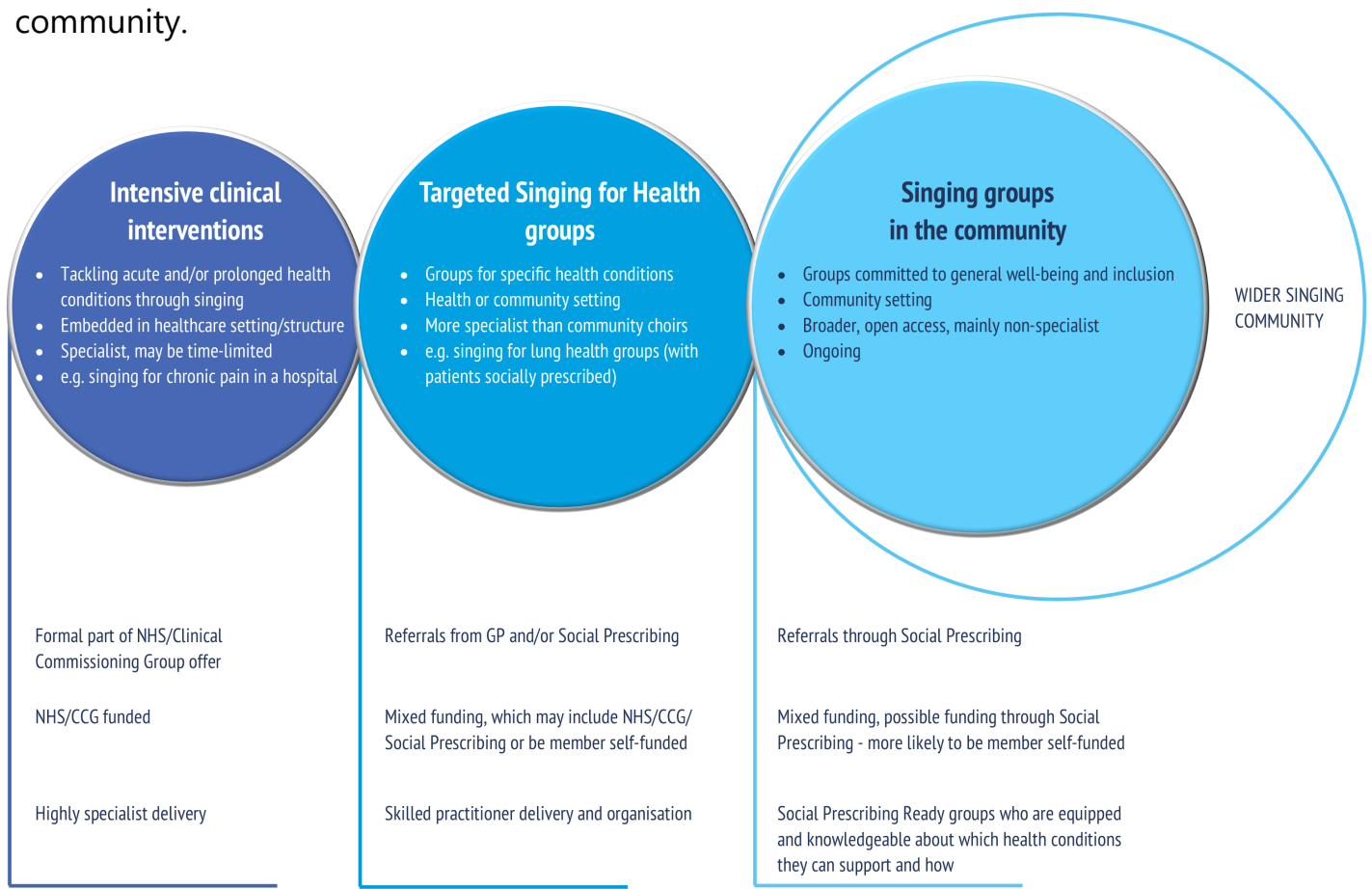
## 2. WHY SINGING?

Singing in a group has a growing evidence base which highlights the benefits for a range of health conditions. Singing can be particularly effective for improving mental health and wellbeing, and combatting loneliness and isolation. It can support lung health and be used to help the management of symptoms for conditions such as Dementia and Parkinson's. Attending group rehearsals as a non-participant can also be beneficial, offering social connection and a feeling of belonging. Find out more at [www.singingforhealthnetwork.co.uk/research-overview](http://www.singingforhealthnetwork.co.uk/research-overview)

From the healthcare system's point-of-view, expected outcomes from socially prescribed singing might include a sense of increased personal wellbeing, systemic benefits over time such as reduced demand on primary and secondary healthcare, and other specific personal benefits such as weight loss or reduction of medication.



Of course, different singing groups have differing levels of connectivity with health & social care systems, and the diagram below (by [Emily Foulkes](#) from Music for Good) helps to explain where they fit in. Social Prescribing is likely to focus mainly on the third bubble – community choirs/singing groups and all other kinds of singing groups in the community.



### 3. WHAT IS THE BENEFIT TO MY SINGING GROUP?

By engaging with Social Prescribing, your group has the opportunity to contribute to wellbeing and health in your community, and become part of a growing network of groups supporting some of those in our society who are most in need. It's also a way to:

- Increase your group's membership
- Identify new funding opportunities, e.g. through the health or care sectors
- Learn more about inclusion and how to remove barriers for people wanting to join your group; this could also benefit your existing members, some of whom may also already have medical or mental wellbeing needs or challenges
- Recruit volunteers

## 4. WHAT DO WE NEED TO HAVE IN PLACE? WHAT'S THE PROCESS?



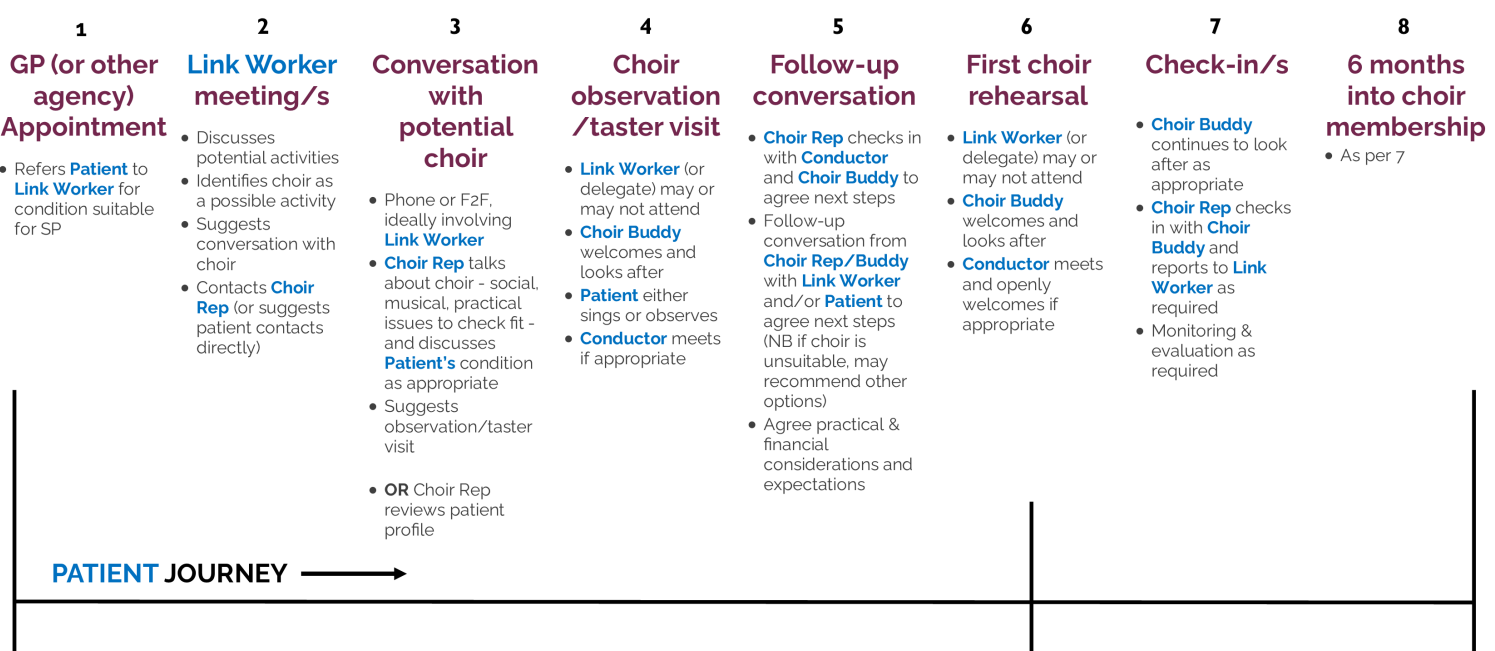
Most important is a process for establishing and managing the relationships, both with the Link Worker/s and the referred person/s, and ensuring that the process is efficient and safe. This might involve identifying a choir representative to make links with Link Workers, and a buddy or buddies to look after those who have been prescribed to your group.

Consider the types of health condition your group might or might not be able to accommodate, and what the impact of that might be. The group's leader or conductor (if there is one) may need to be part of this conversation.

You'll need: a safeguarding policy which includes vulnerable adults and associated procedures; a designated safeguarding person in the choir; and appropriate insurance ([Making Music](#) has templates, training, and a group insurance policy to cover this.)

[Sing for Pleasure](#) have created the following example process for welcoming Social Prescribing referrals. Whilst not exhaustive or applicable to every situation, it provides a useful guide to support planning:

### Example timeline for Social Prescribing to a choir\*



\* 'Choir' = any type of singing group



## 5. HOW DO I FIND MY LOCAL LINK WORKER/S?

Link Workers are employed by lots of different organisations across England and unfortunately there isn't a directory of all services, which makes it slightly more challenging to find Link Workers in your area. NHS advise the best thing to do is find out from your local GP surgery/s whether there is a Social Prescribing scheme locally (try their website first); if they aren't connected with any, you could see if there's any information online about Social Prescribing in your local authority, or try contacting your local council or voluntary services organisation. A bit of online searching should point you in the right direction, and it's worth persevering, as Link Workers will mostly be very receptive to hearing about suitable opportunities.

In some areas, groups of Link Workers have created local area directories, so they can share opportunities between themselves and with their patients. When you make contact with a Link Worker it's worth discussing whether your group could/should be included.

You might consider inviting a Link Worker to see your group in person, or if you've discovered a number of Link Workers in your area, you could organise a special taster session for them, and get them singing!



## 6. WHAT MIGHT A LINK WORKER NEED TO KNOW?



Feel free to use the table on the following pages to help get the right fit. You might consider sharing a copy with your Link Worker/s.

Find out if you can meet them in their workplace or if they will come and meet your group at one of your rehearsals, so they can get a feel for the group atmosphere and how you operate. Ask for feedback and whether they think you may be suitable for some patients.

Most Social Prescribers will be looking to measure wellbeing improvements against the [ONS4 scale](#), and some use the more detailed [Wakefield Social Prescribing Tool](#). It may be worth thinking in advance about how your singing activity could contribute to improved wellbeing using these measures.



## USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SINGING GROUP



QUESTIONS	NOTES
Your group's name	
When and where does the group meet?	
What sort of music does the group sing?	
Is there a need to be able to read music, or is the music learned aurally?	
Is the group auditioned, or is there a particular level of skill required?	
Is attending and simply (or initially) listening or helping at rehearsals an option?	
Are there limitations on the type of person that can join? E.g. age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity	
Does the singing group have appropriate safeguarding in place, e.g. insurance, safeguarding policy, first aid (including mental health first aid), data protection, DBS checks, risk assessments, working with vulnerable citizens?	



## USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SINGING GROUP contd.

QUESTIONS	NOTES
Are there taster opportunities before committing?	
Is there a cost to singing with the group?	
Does the group feel comfortable about being able to accommodate a range of conditions?	
How will the group ensure that the referred person feels welcome? Will there be a buddy, for example?	
How many referrals could the group accommodate?	



## 7. WHAT MIGHT YOUR GROUP NEED TO KNOW BEFORE ACCEPTING A REFERRAL?

- What is the referred person's condition?
  - ⇒ What does it mean in terms of their behaviour or ability (e.g. Parkinson's)?
  - ⇒ Can they point you to information and/or training about this condition?
  - ⇒ Can they complete a 'referred person profile' (see below) with them for you?
- What does the link worker expect in terms of progress for the referred person?
  - ⇒ Will they be monitoring this or not?
  - ⇒ If they are, how will they measure outcomes?
  - ⇒ What do they expect from you?
- Why does the link worker believe your group is a good fit? Their answer will reveal if they understand correctly how your group works!
- If you require a certain level of skill or ability to read music, ask if they have considered this with the referred person as part of the referral process.
- Is there any funding for the referred person's place in your group or are they expected to fund their place themselves or is the group expected to offer a partial or total concession?



Created by the Singing for Health  
Network in partnership with



and the [Singing Network UK](#)

*Produced by Baz Chapman.*

*With thanks to all the many contributors who have advised on the creation of this resource.*

**Third edition - November 2022**

N.B. this is an evolving resource which will be updated periodically. If you have any suggested additions or amendments, or would simply like to tell us about your experiences of Social Prescribing and singing, please write to us at [singingforhealthnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:singingforhealthnetwork@gmail.com)

The UK Singing for Health Network is a membership network for researchers, practitioners and healthcare workers. It aims to bridge research and practice and support the Singing for Health Movement.

**[www.singingforhealthnetwork.co.uk](http://www.singingforhealthnetwork.co.uk)**

