

Social Prescribing Movement: How Does It Interact with Recreational Therapy Practice?

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Introductions

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Session Description

- Social prescribing is a relatively new movement in the U.S., but is well developed in the UK and Canada.
- Holz (2024) brought national attention to the movement in her book, *The Connection Cure*.
- Social prescribing is a “healthcare approach” that links individuals to activities in their communities to address social, physical, emotional needs, aiming to improve health and well-being.
- Using a human-centered design for discussion, this session will focus on the interaction of Recreational Therapy and Social Prescribing for a range of different populations.
- Discussion will lead to developing advocacy materials to inform the profession and key informants about RT as “link workers” in the social prescribing movement.

Learning Outcomes

Participants will be able to:

1. Describe social prescribing as a movement and implications for Recreational Therapy practice.
2. Explain their own perspective as a stakeholder into how RT can best interact with this movement.
3. Name 3 concrete methods for advocating for the unique role that RT can play in this movement.

Session Outline

1. Intro: What is social prescribing?
2. What is human-centered design and how will we use it?
3. Intersection of RT and social prescribing – key aspects
4. Narrowing of focus areas and convergence points
5. Designing advocacy plans for each of the key aspects
6. Sharing the advocacy plan with the group
7. Q & A and resources

Intro to Social Prescribing

**From
Public
Health
England**

Social prescribing – addressing people’s needs in a holistic way

GPs and other health care professionals can refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services, supported by a link worker or connector



SP Addresses Social Isolation in all ages

More emphasis on Social connection

- Quality of our relationships with others is a contributor to health, resilience, and safety.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Loneliness increases risk of premature death by 30% Social Isolation is as deadly as 15 cigarettes a day Number of single households has doubled

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



How Does Social Prescribing Work?

- A physician or other health professional identifies a patient as a candidate for social prescribing and refers them to a link worker.
- The link worker gets to know the patient, their lifestyle, and their goals, and connects the patient with the social prescribing service of best fit.
- The patient follows up with the link worker and physician on the efficacy of the social prescription.

How can we constructively engage around this topic and end up with a plan for how RT can be involved in the SP movement?



Human-Centered Design to Build Better Health Care Interventions

- Uses ethnographic research methods to study “problems” from the perspective of the user (in this case RTs)
- Incorporate end users to understand what works

Step 1- understand the health problem

Brainstorm

Step 2- identify opportunity areas

“Create how might we” statement

Step 3- Test plan in ways that are low risk, cost, and resources

Prototype

Intersection of RT and Social Prescribing

Foundations

Rooted in

- Positive Psychology
- Social Determinants of Health
- Holistic Practices
- Well-being and Quality of Life
- Individualized approach
- Leisure and recreation as meaningful activity
- Health promotion and prevention elements
- Disability within biopsychosocial model (rather than a medical model)

Recreational Therapy

Our focus with clients

01

Meaningful activity

- Enrich lives through purpose, meaning, and community
- Enhance well-being through improved function and health promotion

02

Purpose

- Prescribed activity
- Facilitate coping with the stress of illness, disability, or adversity
- Goal of optimal levels of independence, productivity, well-being, and quality of life.

03

Quality of Life

- Illness, injury, disability, adversity can negatively impact self-esteem, connection, purpose, and function
- Holistic approach addressing all domains of wellness and function



FOCUS Areas

01

Adaptations and modifications to equipment, rules, etc. specific to individual and disability

02

Leisure education – awareness, values, resources, time management, new activities

03

Coping skills – resilience, adjustment, behavior management, emotional regulation, self-esteem, mindfulness

04

Connection and socialization – social and interpersonal skills, loneliness, community involvement

05

Functional skills and abilities – physical, cognitive, emotional & behavioral, social



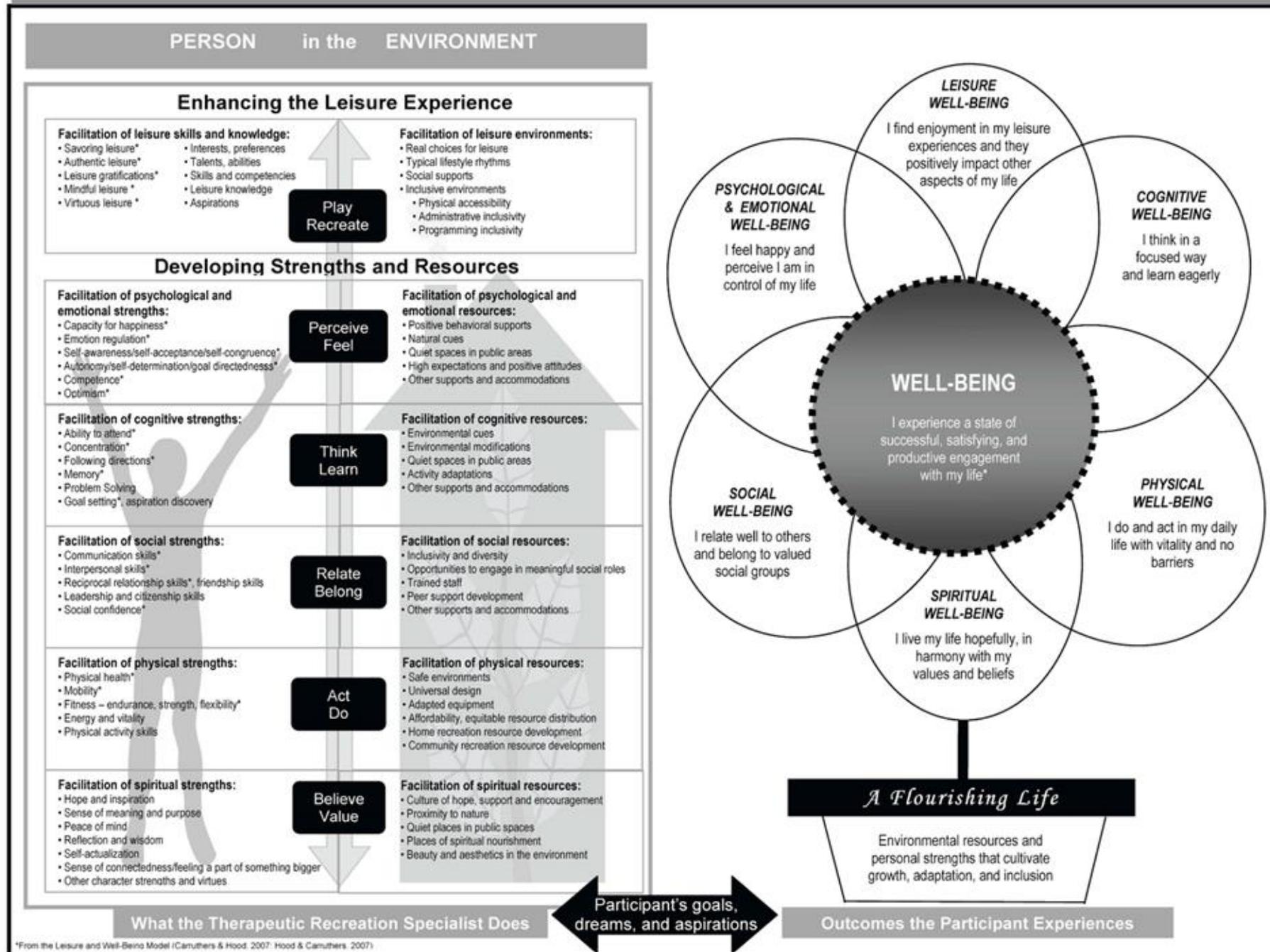
Interventions

- Therapeutic use of art
- Therapeutic use of music
- Bibliotherapy
- Community integration
- Therapeutic use of horticulture
- Adaptive sports and physical activity
- Adventure-based interventions
- Nature-based interventions
- Reminiscence
- Social skills training
- Aquatic therapy
- Animal-assisted interventions
- Stress management
- Mindfulness
- Anger management
- Virtual reality
- Wellness
- Coping skills groups
- Journaling
- Life roles
- Life review
- Video, card and board games
- Support groups



Flourishing through Leisure Model

<https://publications.ici.umn.edu/impact/29-1/the-flourishing-through-leisure-model-supporting-well-being-through-leisure>



Components of TR Service Delivery

Enhancing Leisure Experience

- Savoring Leisure
- Authentic Leisure
- Leisure Gratifications
- Mindful Leisure
- Virtuous Leisure

Developing Resources

Psychological Resources

- Capacity for Happiness
- Emotional Regulation
- Self-awareness/Self-determination/Self-congruence
- Autonomy/Self-determination/Goal Directedness
- Competence
- Optimism/Hope/Positive Illusions
- Sense of Meaning

Social Resources

- Communication Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Reciprocal Relationship Skills
- Social Confidence

Cognitive Resources

- Ability to Attend
- Concentration
- Following Directions
- Problem Solving
- Memory
- Goal Setting

Physical Resources

- Physical Health
- Physical Fitness
- Memory
- Goal setting

Environmental Resources

- Social Connectedness & Social Networks
- Community Engagement/Empowerment

Leisure and Well-Being Model (Hood & Carruthers, 2007)

Positive affect, emotion, and experience

Well-Being

A state of successful, satisfying, and productive engagement with one's life and the realization of one's full physical, cognitive, and social-emotional potential

Cultivation and expression of one's full potential

Proximal and Medial Goals

Distal Goals

Social Prescribing & Recreational Therapy

- Focus on holistic care and well-being
- Integration of arts and nature into healthcare
- Emphasis on community-based connections and resources
- Many of the same outcomes
- Promotion of engagement, socialization, and connection to reduce isolation and meet psychosocial needs

- Social prescribing seeks to connect people to social activities and resources within their communities and to maintain that engagement
- Recreational therapists provide interventions to facilitate access to activities and resources to meet individualized assessed needs, overcome barriers, and become involved in their communities

- Recreational therapy is specifically focused on helping people with disabilities, older adults, chronic conditions, and ongoing challenges in both residential and community-based settings

What are barriers with the intersection of SP and RT?

If we jump on board with this movement does it help or hurt recreational therapy as a profession?

If a "link worker" can do this work, why are we needed?

How does this movement support the need that some have for modifications and adaptations?

Isn't RT already Social Prescribing?

If we are not at the table, will we get left out?

what about people who have identified emotional, social and physical challenges and would need support to benefit?

How do we stay clinically relevant in a social model?

what did Exercise is medicine do for ExSci?

How would an RT get paid for this?

If the physician prescribes social interventions, how do we get the prescription?

Brainstorm: What are the potential intersections between RT and Social Prescribing ? How do we overcome barriers?

- Defer Judgement
- Encourage WILD ideas
- Build on the ideas of others
- Stay focused on the topic
- One conversation at a time
- Be visual
- Go for Quantity





Categorize and share
brainstorm ~~session~~ with
the group



Create “How Might We” Statement

How might we help _____ (user)

to _____ (verb describe their
need)

so that they can _____ - outcome

(why does this matter to them?)

Example: How might we help RTs to link with the social prescriber so that they can improve social isolation and loneliness of teens with mental health?

Share your statements with the group

Prioritize and pick the best one from your group and share with the large group

Create Prototype

Make your ideas tangible

Communicate your idea clearly and succinctly with you user in mind to get feedback

1. Name it: Make it memorable
2. Describe it: What's it about?
3. What makes it valuable?
4. Describe the features and attributes
5. Use words, stick figures, shapes to bring ideas to life

Possible Prototypes: Storyboard or Scripts

STORYBOARDS A "user journey" storyboard can show a customer's steps when signing up for a new service, from the homepage to the confirmation page.

- **What is the user's journey?**

A food delivery app storyboard showing a user seeing an ad, downloading the app, placing an order, and following real-time updates as they go to pick up the food.

- **Effortless App Onboarding:**

A storyboard that guides a new user through the first-time experience of a mobile app, starting with a welcome screen and showing the steps for creating an account, such as signing up with Google, Facebook, or email.

Share your prototype
with the large group!

References and Resources

McKenney, A. (2025). The interaction of social prescribing and recreational therapy in modern healthcare. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/intersection-social-prescribing-recreational-therapy-modern-q8jnf/?trackingId=q3LXIcmdRuWagFNH5xN%2F3w%3D%3D>