

# "Social prescribing is the best job in the NHS. It's perfect for anyone passionate about social justice and combatting inequality."

Lydia persevered in voluntary roles and overcome personal challenges before finding a fulfilling position in the NHS.

## Lydia Hulme

### Social prescriber

#### Employer or university

Carlisle Healthcare Primary Care Network

Social prescriber Lydia Hulme

### How I got into the role

#### Expand / collapse

I became interested in public health and inequalities after becoming unwell in 2013. I had to put my degree on hold and became very isolated. It led me to volunteer for Guide Dogs for the Blind and the NHS and eventually into paid work improving healthcare locally.

However, my journey wasn't without its challenges. I was registered blind, and it made getting employment difficult. After 460 job applications, I still hadn't managed to secure a single interview, and when I was finally invited to interviews, I was told by one recruiter they 'didn't understand how having a visually impaired staff member would work', as there was some travelling involved in the role. It became very disheartening.

I had a breakthrough when I volunteered for a week-long NHS Rapid Process Improvement Workshop as a patient voice for ophthalmology. It led to me focussing my volunteering efforts on campaign coordination and improving outcomes for people who are blind or visually impaired. I eventually secured a job working in operations for a primary care <sup>[1]</sup> provider. It shows that a commitment to volunteering can lead to paid employment.

I was inspired to pursue social prescribing as a career when it became clear how many patients with complex social factors visit their GP. From this point, I knew this was where I wanted to work, and I haven't looked back since.

## **What I do**

### **Expand / collapse**

I work in GP surgeries, out in the community and in people's homes. I see people struggling with a range of issues from social isolation to weight loss and from financial issues to bereavement. Some have chronic illness and persistent pain while others are homeless or have mental health challenges. Every person is unique, and I feel lucky to be able to help them live their best life.

Initially I spend about an hour with someone, discussing their concerns and taking a close look at the aspects of their wellbeing that they are struggling with. I then refer or 'link' them to appropriate support. These services can really help them make positive changes in their lives.

I also meet voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and other NHS departments. This is to share information and highlight where services have gaps and develop networks or groups to help fill these gaps.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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My job is a privilege. The best thing is seeing someone get back on their feet. A real highlight was supporting a homeless family to find a place to live. I called to check in after they had been placed into a new home. They had secured employment and told me their lives had completely changed for the better.

I also love producing case studies of people I work with after I have improved their health outcomes. It helps show how much my role can improve people's health.

The biggest challenge is the lack of regulation for the social prescribing role. It means that patients often don't know what to expect. Some NHS colleagues also don't appreciate the workload and emotional strain the job can have.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

### **Expand / collapse**

It's the best job in the NHS. You get to spend time supporting fantastic people and getting to know their families and support networks. It's the perfect role for anyone passionate about social justice and combatting inequality with an interest in public health outcomes. It's not always easy but being able to witness someone make positive changes in their life is so rewarding.

In the future, I hope to become an accredited social prescriber and eventually move into a personalised care leadership role in my local area.

## **Life outside work**

### **Expand / collapse**

I am a director trustee of a local Early Years Provision and a Local Advisory Board member for Cumbria Education Trust. I also volunteer for Guide Dogs and am currently on the waiting list for my second dog after my first retired in 2023.

In my free time I'm a keen crocheter and love making baby clothes and home furnishings.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/clinical-support-staff/social-prescribing-link-worker/real-life-story-lydia-hulme>

#### **Links**

[1] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Primary\\_care](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Primary_care)