

Case Study

Turning vacant hospital space into a social prescribing hub

MICHAEL BURKE WELLBEING CENTRE, HARTISMERE HOSPITAL, EYE, SUFFOLK

Background

The NHS Long Term Plan includes a focus on helping people stay healthier for longer and supporting community activities that help improve people's wellbeing; the fitter, healthier and more socially connected we are, the less likely it is we'll need to access our local GP or other health professionals.

The NHS is therefore developing social prescribing networks across the country. Patients with multiple complex needs are referred by their GP to social prescribing services where their needs can be assessed and appropriate community services can be recommended such as adult learning, employment support or activity groups to improve confidence or reduce isolation.

The Challenge

Many social prescribing networks are in need of more appropriate and affordable space to meet with patients and for community groups to host activities. As an owner of 3000 properties, NHS Property Services is in prime position to offer such space and chose Hartismere Hospital as a proof of concept since it had significant vacant space.

The Solution

We restructured and renovated Hartismere Hospital's old birthing unit, creating bookable indoor space for groups of up to 40, a separate room for small groups, kitchen, play area, and office space. Outside, we created allotment beds, a sensory garden and an outdoor gym.

We worked with Groundwork, a charity that provides practical help to people who need to improve their communities and their own circumstances, to ensure that developments at the centre were fit for purpose. We also worked with the local community to help shape the site and what it would be used for, including organising steering groups with patient participant groups, the local authority, clinical teams and VCSE organisations.

The Result

Since the centre opened in July 2019, over 150 people have benefited from facilitated sessions including those by Headway, Eye Health Centre, Stroke and Aphasia Group, peri-natal mental health training, Marie Curie, and local and regional patient participant groups.

Allotment space is being used by the neighbouring secondary school and Opportunity Group, a family support group for young children with special needs. The centre's sensory garden is in regular use by the on-site care home. The centre also provides office and meeting space for the community connector who coordinates all social prescribing activity for referred patients within Eye and the surrounding area.

We will continue to promote the use of the site for community groups within the centre of Eye.

Customer Feedback

"Using the Michael Burke Wellbeing Centre will mean we can work throughout the summer, plus paint outside in the beautiful garden. Participants say that they enjoy the Wellbeing Centre as it is well equipped and has good light for artists, and is nice and warm."

Painting for Pleasure

~ Using the centre on a weekly basis

