The Social Prescription: Connecting People to What Matters to Them



Kate Berk, MA Candidate
Founder and Link Worker
Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative

Learning Objectives

- Define social prescribing and explain how it works
- Describe at least 3 groups of people who benefit most
- Explain how arts and activities help the brain and body
- Use the OSPC Referral Guide to connect clients to programs
- Identify your own first step as a community health worker

Better Health Pathways Hub · Learning Collaborative · Nov 2026

The Social Prescription

It's not what's the matter WITH you
It's what matters TO you

Kate Berk

Founder, Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative

Arts & Wellness Coach | M.A. Candidate, Arts in Medicine, University of Florida

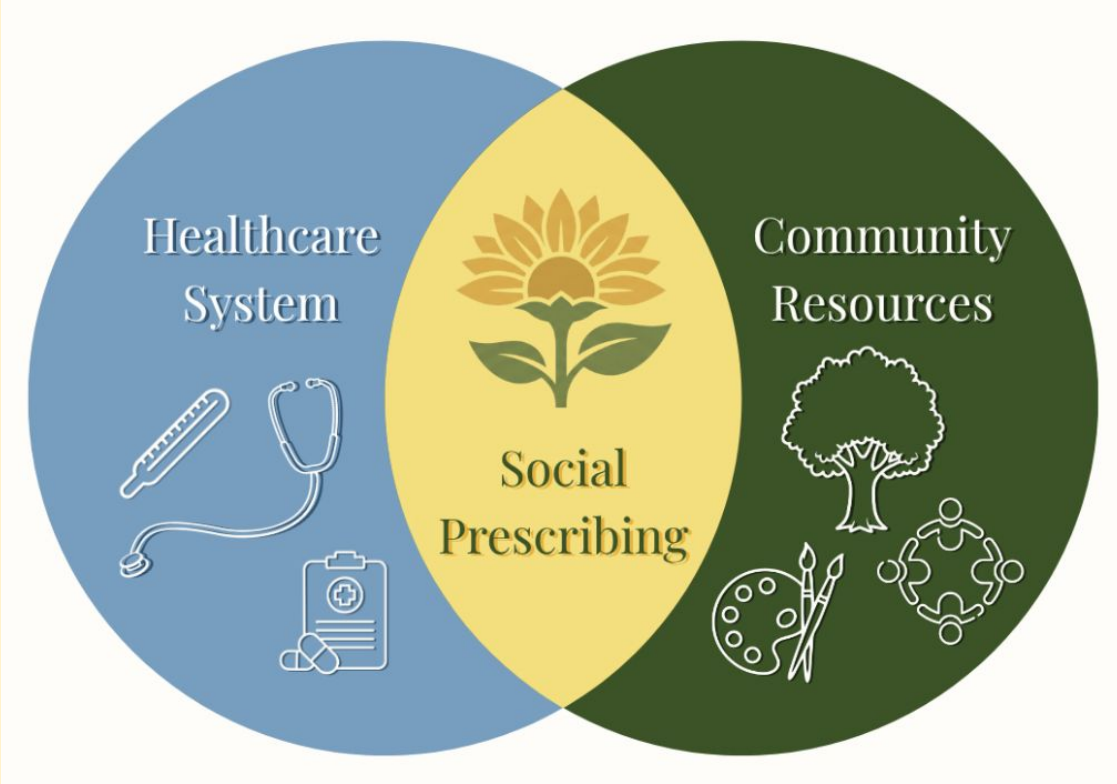
Let's get started with a sample dose!

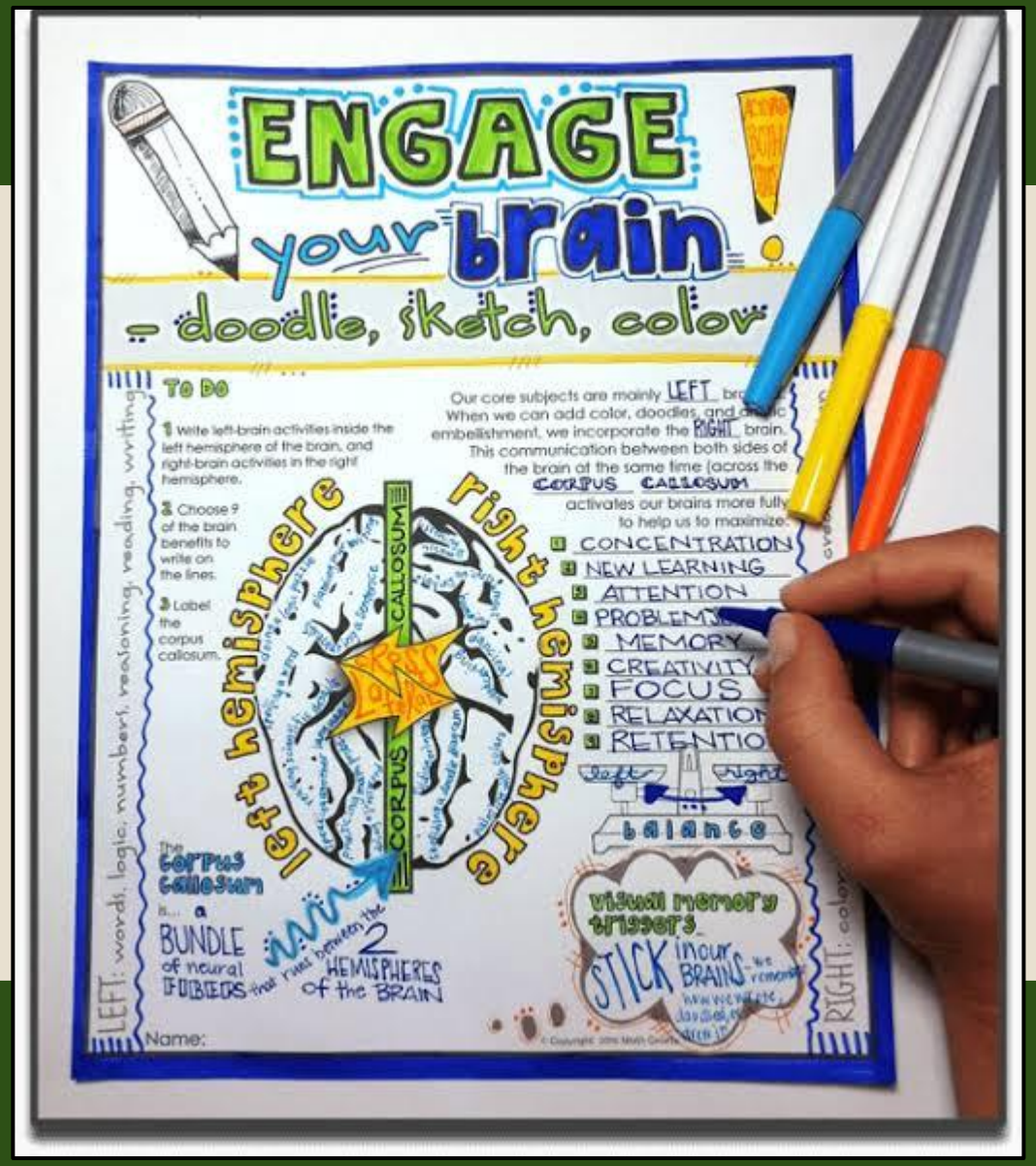
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WHERE WE'RE HEADED

By the End of This Session, You'll Be Able To...

1. **Define** social prescribing and explain how it works
2. **Describe** at least 3 groups of people who benefit most
3. **Explain** how arts and activities help the brain and body
4. **Use** the OSPC Referral Guide to connect clients to programs
5. **Identify** your own first steps as a community health worker





P.S. You are encouraged to color/doodle throughout this presentation ✍️


A1C is borderline
Blood pressure is slightly elevated
Chronic back pain
Sleeping poorly
Barely leaving the house since her husband passed eight months ago
Starting to develop social anxiety
Zero interest in seeing a therapist

Socializing + Music + Movement = Multiple Active Ingredients 💊



Has anyone in here ever felt disconnected?





What activities make you feel “plugged in” and light you up?

I’ve felt lonely

- Bullied a lot
- Mental health was not good
- I didn’t have the words then, but **dance became my health practice**



Who am I? Dancer, Certified Health and Wellness Coach, Arts in Medicine Consultant, Founder of OSPC





Connect people to their bodies, community organizations, and each other

Love social prescriptions related to movement, art, nature, and new friends!

What Is Social Prescribing?

When a healthcare professional or trusted community member connects someone with community activities that support their health and well-being, in addition to medical care.



Photo: Vitaly Gariev / Unsplash

~15

cigarettes/day, the mortality risk equivalent of loneliness

[2]

+29%

increased risk of heart disease from social isolation

[3]

+50%

increased risk of dementia

[4]

CLOSE TO HOME

The Need

The gap between demand and access in CLE

- Black and Latino residents face higher rates of social isolation — due to historic disinvestment, housing, and job loss
- Seniors on the west side often lack transportation to stay connected
- New moms are 2–3x more likely to feel isolated in the first year

Source: Cuyahoga County Health Needs Assessment 2023



38%

of Ohio adults reported feeling lonely in 2024
[5][8]

75 of 88

counties are mental health professional shortage areas
[6]

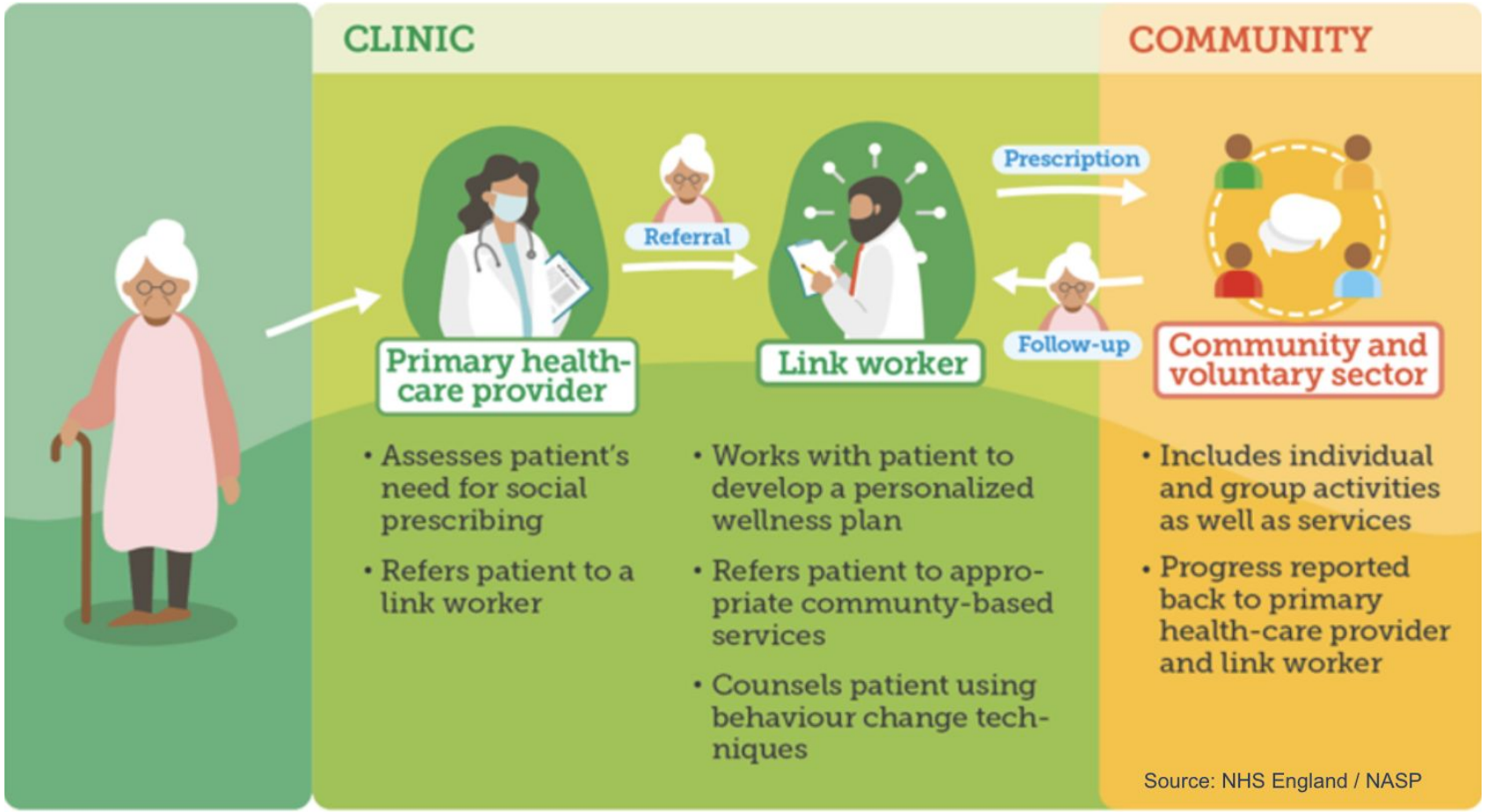
60%+

of Ohio adults live with at least one chronic condition
[7]

HOW REFERRALS ACTUALLY HAPPEN

Meet the Link Worker–that's YOU!

The link worker is the person in the middle who spends time with someone to understand what matters to them, then connects that person to community resources instead of/alongside traditional medical prescriptions



Source: NHS England / National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) [12]

How Does It Work?

1

Identify

Recognize when someone has nonclinical social needs with visit form and 1-pager

2

Listen

Ask open questions. What matters to you? What brings you joy?

3

Connect

Match the person to a program or group that is culturally responsive and accessible

4

Support

Follow up. Remove barriers. Celebrate progress.

CHWs are the heart of this model. You know your community!

FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

Social Prescribing Foundational Pillars

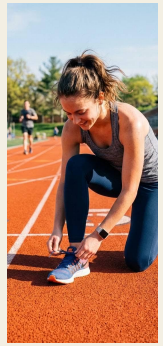
1 Arts/Culture

Both participatory and passive (music class vs going to see live music)



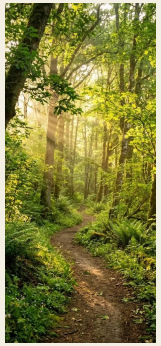
2 Movement

Group exercise, virtual stretch class, walking clubs, dance programs.



3 Nature

Community gardening, guided/individual hikes, green + blue spaces



4 Volunteering

Sharing skills, participating in community projects, helping those undergoing struggles



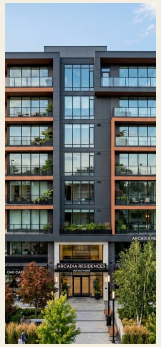
5 Social Connection

Spiritual Groups, AA meetings, book clubs, sports leagues, silent disco



* Social Drivers

Transportation, Housing, Food, basic services



IT'S NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Who Is Social Prescribing For?



TARGET POPULATION FOCUS

👶 Young Moms & New Families



The Isolation & Risks

Postpartum Mental Health

1 in 5 new moms has postpartum depression or anxiety.

Birth Trauma Disparities

Black mothers in Cuyahoga Co. are **3x more likely** to experience birth trauma.

Pregnancy Isolation Risks

Isolation during pregnancy raises risk of **preterm birth** and low birth weight.

Erosion of Support Networks

New moms often lose support, especially **teens and single parents**.

Social Prescribing Connections

✓ Free Mom Groups & Playgroups
Safe peer spaces to share experiences

✓ Doula Support
Personalized birth & postpartum care

✓ Art Workshops
Creative outlets for stress relief

✓ WIC-Linked Programs
Nutritional & maternal health aid

✓ Stroller Nature Walks
Outdoor movement & fresh air

What can you think of?

TARGET POPULATION FOCUS

💊 Substance Use & Recovery

Isolation Drives Addiction

People who feel lonely face significantly higher health and addiction risks:

3x More Likely
to develop alcohol problems

5x More Likely
to develop opioid use disorder



Higher Relapse Risk

More likely to relapse when individuals lack meaningful social connection and supportive community networks.

🎨 Why Arts Help in Recovery

Non-clinical creative pathways that rebuild lives and social fabric:

✓ Identity Beyond Addiction

Builds positive self-worth and purpose beyond the label of "addict"

✓ Shared Activity

Creates authentic peer connections through collaborative creative projects

✓ Neurological Calm

Calms the nervous system and lowers stress without relying on substances

✓ Belonging

Gives individuals a welcoming community and a safe place to belong

TARGET POPULATION FOCUS

👴👵 Older Adults: Diabetes & Parkinson's

Diabetes

- **1 in 10** Ohioans has diabetes
- Black Ohioans are **60% more likely** to have it

✓ Walking Groups
Lowers blood sugar & promotes gentle exercise

✓ Cooking Classes
Healthy nutrition tailored on a budget

✓ Dance & Movement
Fun active group movement programs

✓ Community Gardens
Outdoor connection & fresh produce



Parkinson's Disease

- Affects movement, balance, and mood
- Leads to isolation as daily activities get harder

✓ Dance for Parkinson's Programs
Proven to improve physical balance & motor coordination

✓ Singing Groups
Helps maintain vocal strength, articulation & breathing

✓ Art Classes
Supports fine motor control + meaningful social connection

NEUROSCIENCE & WELLNESS

🧠 How Art Calms the Brain

(This is science, not just fun!)

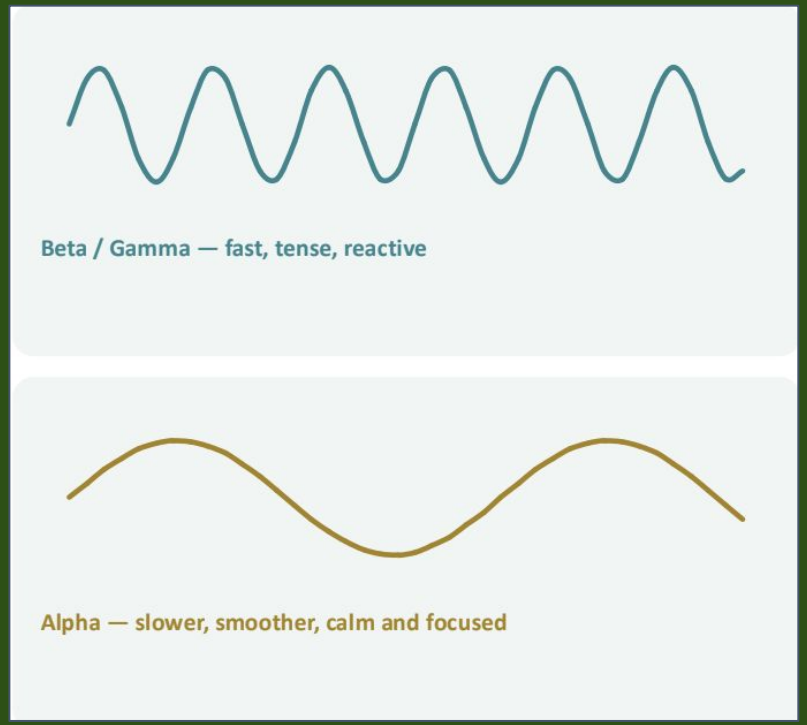
Calms Stress Hormones

Making art lowers cortisol — the stress hormone.

⏱️ **Even 20 minutes helps.**

⚡ Changes Brain Waves

Creative activity increases alpha waves — the same calm state as meditation.



Turns On the Calm System

Art activates the parasympathetic nervous system — your body's "rest and digest" mode.

Builds Connection

Shared creative activities release oxytocin — the bonding hormone.

MEASURABLE RESULTS & IMPACT

The Evidence Is Strong

🩺 ↓ 28%

Fewer doctor visits

UK social prescribing pilots

🚑 ↓ 24%

Fewer ER trips

NHS 2021

😊 **Wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose all rose, and anxiety fell.**

Bu et al., 2026



Community & Connection Drive Real Health

Social prescribing creates measurable health & wellbeing outcomes

IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING IN CLEVELAND

Case Snapshot: The OSPC MetroHealth Pilot

88%

of participants felt more connected

20 participants · 6 planned doses



Partnership: MetroHealth Behavioral Health

Population: A group of participants from MetroHealth's Behavioral Health Department, referred to community hikes, healthy food access, and group activities

Next steps: Six doses total planned with local community organizations

"Meeting people and [the] hike; healthy food and more activities [and] new opportunities!" (Participant, Dose 1)







Photos: Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative / MetroHealth

"The best medicine I got was someone who listened." **— Cuyahoga County resident**

Link Worker Training!



Photo: Playhouse Square Ars + Minds

COMMUNICATION SHIFT

Start With Strengths

Social prescribing is not about telling people what to do. It's about helping them find what they already want.

✕ Instead of Telling:

"You need to exercise more."

"You should stop being so stressed."

"Have you tried therapy?"

"I'll sign you up for this program."

✓ Try Asking:

"What did you used to love doing?"

"What gives you energy?"

"What gets in the way?"

"What would feel like a small first step?"

REFERRAL GUIDE

How to Use the OSPC Referral Guide

01 **Scan the QR code** or go to the website →

02 Click **"Referral Guide – Cleveland"**

03 **Search** by ZIP code, topic, or population

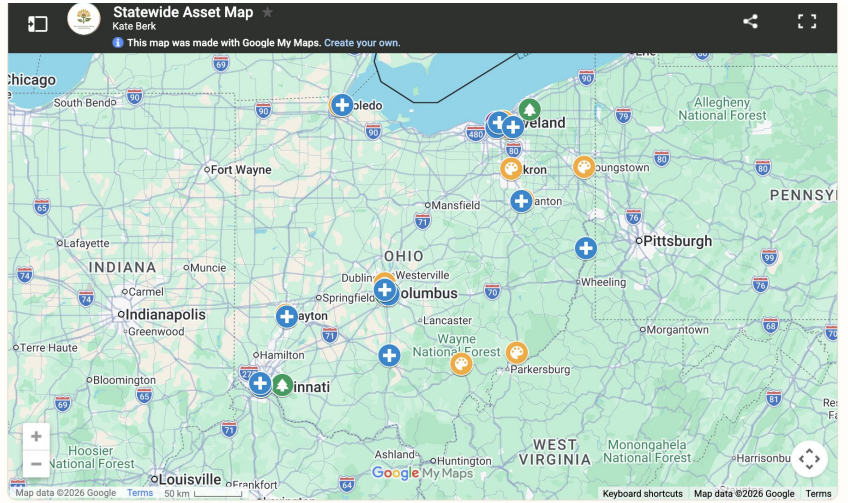
04 **Find a program** that fits your client

05 **Share the info** — or help them sign up right now

💡 **Tip:** Bookmark this on your phone for easy access

Scan here for Cleveland-Specific Activity Ideas





Check it out:

New Learning Module

You're Not Alone: Staying Connected for Better Health

Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative (OSPC)

Feeling lonely sometimes is normal. But when it lasts a long time, it can hurt your health. **The good news is that staying connected can help you feel better and live a longer, healthier life.**

WHAT IS LONELINESS?

Loneliness is a feeling. It happens when the people in your life don't feel like "enough." You can feel lonely even when people are around you.

Social isolation is different. It means you don't have much contact with other people. It's about how much contact you have, not how you feel about it.

WHY IT MATTERS

About 1 in 2 adults in the U.S. feel lonely. Feeling lonely a lot can raise your risk for heart disease, stroke, memory problems, and feeling sad or worried.

It can be as hard on your body as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Talking about it and getting involved with your community has been proven to help!

Did you know? People with strong friendships and family ties are 50% more likely to live longer. Art, music, being outside, moving your body, and helping others can all build stronger connections.

Take a Moment to Check In

- What matters most to you right now?
- What has brought you joy or comfort in the past?
- Who or what already helps you feel supported?

WHAT CAN YOU DO? START SMALL.

Pick one thing below that sounds interesting. Try it alone or invite a friend or family member along.

🎨 **Arts & Culture**
Visit a museum or library, take an art or dance class, or join a choir.

🎲 **Social Groups**
Join a book club, a game night, an open-mic event, or a spiritual group.

🚶 **Move Your Body**
Walk, dance, do yoga, or play a sport with others.

🌳 **Get Into Nature**
Walk in a park, do some gardening, go hiking, go to the lake, or watch birds.

🤝 **Volunteer**
Help at a food pantry, school, animal shelter, garden, or assist a neighbor.

🏡 **At Home**
Read, journal, take an online class with family, or attend an online event.

Social connection and having something that matters to you are just as important to your health as eating and sleeping well.

Find Connection Near You in Cleveland

Scan this code to visit the Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative website and find the Cleveland Social Prescribing (CLE SP) Referral Guide. It's a free, living directory of local programs and events.

Sources: U.S. Surgeon General (2023); Holt-Lunstad (2024); World Health Organization (2025) | Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative

My Social Prescription

Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative (OSPC)

Pick one idea from the front page that matters to you. Use this page to turn it into a simple plan. Filling in each blank helps make it more likely to actually happen.

℞ What I will do

Where **When** *(day & time)*

With whom *(if anyone — a friend, family member, or group)*

Barriers that might get in the way *(check all that apply)*

☐ Transportation ☐ Cost ☐ Time ☐ Energy or motivation
☐ Feeling nervous or unsure ☐ Other: _____

My plan to work around those barriers

My backup plan *(what I'll do if this doesn't work out)*

One small step I will take this week

How I will feel after I take this step

Participant name + *(optional) CHW* **Date**

Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative | ohiosocialprescribingcollaborative.com

Find a new face: Link Worker Practice

1. **What matters to you?**
2. **What do people need to know about me and my life to best support me?**
3. **At what period were you the most happy in your life, and what were you doing at that time that brought you that feeling?**
4. **What would you want to be connected with to get that feeling back?**

Participant brainstorms ideas.

If more suggestions/supports are needed, Link Worker Offers



QR Code Has CLE SP Referral Guide for ideas

ACTION STEPS

You Can Start Now

As a CHW, you already have the most important tool: relationships.

01 📋 **Read the new learning Guide** and take accompanying 1-pager to your next visit

02 📱 **Save the OSPC Referral Guide link** on your phone — use it today

03 👥 **Think of one client** who feels isolated — could you refer them to one thing?

04 ✉️ **Share the referral guide** with one colleague or clinic this week

05 🎨 **Try a social prescription** for yourself — notice what happens

💡 **Tip:** Check out the new learning pathway!



Loneliness & Social Isolation

A PLAIN-LANGUAGE LEARNING PATHWAY

Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative

Check-In

How often do you feel that you lack companionship?

How often do you feel left out or isolated from others?

Source: Hughes et al., 2004

Scan to visit us

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

Can You Self-Prescribe?

Pause & Reflect

Ask yourself what matters to you. How often do you actually stop and do that?

Time & Swap

If time is tight, swap: trade a drink catchup for a night at the museum. Scrolling for coloring, etc.

Intense Creative Focus

An hour of intense focus on something creative each week is ideal.

Remove Cost Barriers

If cost is a barrier, search “free” or “low-cost.” You'll be surprised what turns up!

Microdose Movement

Microdose movement to build toward your own version of 10,000 steps (or dance parties!) a day.

Creative Variety

Variety matters. The best diets mix it up. Your creative practice should too.

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Survey Time!

Local Impact

OSPC in CLE

The Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative (OSPC) is driving key initiatives:

01 **Building a network** of providers, CHWs, and community orgs across our state

02 **Creating a shared referral guide** so CHWs have one place to find resources

03 **Training Healthcare workers like you** to become link workers

04 **Advocating for insurance coverage** of social prescriptions

✨ **You are part of building something new** ✨

A low-barrier next step:

Try one personal SP dose this week! Bonus points to follow up with your new fellow link worker.

Visit OSPC's Website for more resources + add to our Asset Map
ohiosocialprescribingcollaborative.com

Instagram / LinkedIn: @ohiosocialprescribing · Ohio Social Prescribing Collaborative

Contact: Kate Berk · kate@ohiosocialprescribingcollaborative.com · 804-819-9919 · ohiosocialprescribingcollaborative.com

Scan to visit our website

Questions? Want to collaborate?

Better Health Partnership

Collaborating for a healthy community

2026 Learning Collaborative

Break Time!

Grab some water, stretch your legs, chat with your neighbor!

We resume at 2:45 PM.

SCAN for Full Agenda and Bios

#2026BHPLearningCollaborative