

Evaluation brief for Blue Prescribing

1. Summary

Rationale and background

This evaluation focuses on the Blue Prescribing project, a nature-based self-management programme which will take place in the London Borough of Richmond. The project is similar to the growing health practice of social prescribing, which enables health care professionals to refer people to local, non-clinical services to improve health and wellbeing and make better use of community resources.

Being able to spend meaningful time in blue and green space is associated with better health outcomes but is unequal in the UK. Although exercising outdoors during the pandemic has provided respite for some, those experiencing mental health problems, and those most at risk, faced greater barriers to accessing nature. They are more likely to live in urban areas with fewer natural spaces and less likely to have the means to travel to those spaces. The Blue Prescribing Project aims to enable greater access to those that need it as a core part of the project.

This project follows an earlier 2019 pilot project which took place in Slimbridge (the evaluation is available to read [here](#)) and builds on this by incorporating the Mental Health Foundation's self-management approach, delivered online at a separate time.

Programme information

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), in collaboration with MHF, will design and run structured, hands-on, nature-based activities in small groups for three cohorts, two hours per week for six weeks. The Mental Health Foundation will then follow up, possibly on the same day, with online self-management training for an hour, delivered by project staff, with allocated tasks to be completed by participants. There is a period of coproduction before delivery in which the content of the self-management course is finalised. It is anticipated that Blue Prescribing will run 20 sessions with approximately 15 participants each. These will be categorised into seasonal blocks, starting in Winter, Spring and Summer.

While the project we are seeking evaluation for is based in the London Borough of Richmond, a sister project at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Steart Marshes in Somerset is currently running (since March 2021), delivering to different cohorts of participants, in a rural setting. The Steart Marshes project is funded through the Governments Green Recovery Challenge Fund. We will share learnings between this and the London Wetlands Centre project to ensure we are maximising the learnings and benefits to participants.

Recruitment to the sister project has been a shared process, through link workers in Somerset and the Open Mental Health Alliance, an ecosystem of mental health services. There will be multiple routes to recruitment for the Blue Prescribing project in London, however, due to the different urban context. Currently, there is a growing database of people resulting from press coverage and direct GP engagement in Hammersmith. WWT is also working with a link worker in the area and exploring the possibility of including already formed peer support groups. An important part of the evaluation will focus on this and identifying some of the referral pathways in Hammersmith. The Blue Prescribing project hopes to reach approximately 300 participants.

As well as evaluating the implementation of the project, we would also look to identify progress against outcomes of the project at an individual level:

1. Increase participants' confidence and sense of empowerment to manage their own mental health
2. Increase participants' feelings of connectedness with others
3. Increase participants' feelings of connectedness with nature

Previously in the Slimbridge 2019 pilot, standardised measures for mental wellbeing (Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale), anxiety (Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7), stress (Perceived Stress Scale) and emotional wellbeing (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) were used. In previous self-management evaluations¹, measures like WEMWBS were also used as well as scales focussing on goal attainment and healthy lifestyles. We would like your input on the choice of measures to use that will result in us being able to demonstrate the programme's impact as effectively and meaningfully as possible.

We would also like to capture some basic monitoring data from the project and would welcome your support and steer on what would be most useful and feasible to collect.

2. Aims & Objectives of the project evaluation

The initial aims being considered are:

1. Examining progress against programme outcomes as stated above
2. Evaluating the implementation of the project, including some research/mapping exercise on recruitment and referral pathways. While this evaluation predominantly focuses on the London project, we would be interested in capturing comparative insights from the sister project in Steart Marshes that could help inform lessons around sustainability/scalability
3. Conducting research to determine whether there is a link between self-management and reduced GP visits/ primary care appts and potentially secondary care mental/physical health services.

¹ It should be noted that self-management courses were originally targeted to those with long term health conditions or people with more severe mental health diagnoses.

- Critically examining the self-management approach using Blue Prescribing as a case study, with a specific emphasis on the relative importance/value of the key components (goal setting, problem solving and peer support) and understanding what value the self-management component adds to the overall programme, in addition to the way it complements the nature-based activities.

We would welcome early discussion to finalise these aims and objectives.

3. Budget

£16,000 to £20,000. Bids should be inclusive of VAT.

4. Timeline

The co-production phase in London is due to begin in September with delivery to begin in November, to allow for Winter, Spring and Summer blocks of courses.

Discussion would be welcomed at an early stage to consider key milestones for programme delivery and evaluation.

The diagram below reflects the anticipated timings of the programme delivery and evaluation.

	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	
Programme delivery in sister site (Stearth Marshes)		[Shaded]														
Coproduction activities for London site				[Shaded]												
Delivery of London pilot programme (in seasonal blocks - Winter, Spring and Summer)						[Shaded]										
Final evaluation report due																22-Aug
Internal MHF session and feedback meeting																[Shaded]

5. Research design/methodology

We do not have a set idea about the methodology for this evaluation and we would like you to demonstrate in full your proposed methodology.

As mentioned in the summary, we would like to understand your rationale for your proposed choice of outcome measures. The audiences for this evaluation report are both internal (specifically, MHF and WWT) and external – in particular, policymakers in national and local government and mental health, and other commissioners - with a specific focus on sustainability and the potential to scale up such provision.

We would like bidders to clearly illustrate how they intend to evaluate the project against its aims and objectives. We would also like bidders to include in their application assurances regarding safeguarding, and ethical and data protection considerations.

Evaluators will be responsible for data collection and can be supported by the MHF Project Manager where appropriate.

6. Milestones and deliverables

Milestones:

- Session with our Programmes team to work through and document the logic model for *Blue Prescribing*.

Deliverables:

- A final report (up to 20 pages, excluding references and annexes) that meets the aims and objectives of the research as outlined in Section 4 of this brief, and includes an Executive Summary which also provides a stand-alone summary of key findings from the research. We welcome report designs that reflect the creative nature of the project.
- To host an internal MHF session (joint with WWT colleagues) to share the process of evaluation and findings.
- To have a smaller meeting on lessons learnt from the evaluation and following this up with a written output.

A first draft of the report will be required by Monday 25th July 2022 for comments and feedback. The final report will need to be submitted by **Monday 22nd August 2022** after delivery is complete.

7. Working together

In addition to the delivery of the above milestones and outputs, it is expected that the following activities will be undertaken by the successful evaluator:

- i. Attend Inception Meeting with key stakeholders
- ii. Iterative development meetings - participate in regular catch-ups with the Project Manager, particularly in the first few months of the project, to keep up to date/contribute/stay informed on developments within the project.
- iii. Provide monthly (or bi-monthly) evaluation check-ins (whether by Teams or email) with the Senior Evaluation Officer at the Foundation. These discussions can help to draw out the key learning points to date (so that these can be fed into the ongoing development of the project) and where appropriate, discuss the implications of the research undertaken on the subsequent stages of research.

8. Working with the Mental Health Foundation

Since 1949, the Mental Health Foundation has been the UK's leading charity for everyone's mental health. With prevention at the heart of what we do, we aim to find and address the sources of mental health problems so that people and communities can thrive.

Our work focuses on the prevention of mental ill-health and the promotion of opportunities for the development of good mental health, which is reflected in our five-year [strategy](#). Our universal programmes are for everyone because we all have mental health and with the right tools we can protect and promote this at every stage of life. We also deliver targeted programmes because the risk and the impact of mental health problems is greatest for those who experience inequality and disadvantage.

We want to work with evaluators that align with our four organisational values:

Our values	How this relates to evaluation
<p>1. Determined pioneers: We are passionate, committed, strive for excellence and rigour. We wrestle with tough issues and topics, willing to hold tension and complexity. We search for new approaches, challenge convention and push boundaries.</p>	<p>Our evaluators need to be committed to undertaking evaluations to a high standard and be able to adapt their approach if/when challenges arise. We want to work with evaluators who can think creatively to ensure that the data we obtain is as rich and meaningful as possible.</p>
<p>2. Side by side: We achieve through working together. We pursue connection and shared understanding. We embrace difference and lived experience. We trust our people and partners, and make space for reflection, fun and personal growth. We recognise, and own our power and privilege, and act with humility.</p>	<p>We are interested in participatory approaches where feasible. The Foundation believes that lived experience is incredibly valuable to mental health research, and we would like this reflected in our evaluations.</p>
<p>3. Walking our talk: We embrace diversity and operate with openness, prioritising the mental health of our staff and supporters. We recognise and learn from our mistakes and seek honest feedback, without spin. We recognize the need to keep listening and acting with authenticity.</p>	<p>It is important that, as commissioners of evaluation services, we work with partners that prioritise the wellbeing of their staff. We want to establish open communication from the outset of a partnership and welcome honest feedback from the people we work with so that we can make improvements and learn how to best support each other.</p>

	We also want to understand how evaluators ensure they choose their most relevant researchers for the project, considering diversity and unconscious biases.
<p>4. Making a difference: We are passionate about the role we can play in achieving positive change. We are about the outcome, not the glory. We generate and share evidence of what works. We are creative and action focused.</p>	<p>We really want to understand the impact of our programmes, how they can be improved and their potential for scalability and sustainability. All our programmes aim to understand what makes a positive difference for mental health and how we can make this happen. We want to work with evaluators who are passionate and committed to making positive change in public mental health, and for this to be reflected in the quality of their work.</p> <p>We want our evaluations to inform our thinking and develop our evidence around what works in prevention and what doesn't.</p>

The language that we use

It is important that the language we use reflects our values and does not perpetuate mental health stigma or prejudice. We talk about mental health *problems* or distress, as opposed to illness or issues, and generally try to avoid overly medical language. We would welcome a discussion at initiation about the terminology to use/avoid.

9. Application details:

Please outline the following in your application:

- Your understanding of our research needs
- Your experience of conducting similar research
- Your proposed research methodology
- Your required inputs from the Foundation and its partners
- Your approach to project management and quality assurance
- Your ability to complete the work to the deadlines set out above

- A budget for this piece of work, outlining the resource required for each stage of the project (please show the day rate for each team member)
- Please include CVs of the research staff who will be responsible for this work.

10. Evaluation criteria

The following criteria will be used to score proposals:

Criteria	Weighting (%)
Approach to the project, incl proposed methodology	20
Value for money and ability to meet timelines	30
Alignment with the Mental Health Foundation's values	10
Experience of working on similar projects	20
Opportunities for inclusion of participants in evaluation	20

11. Tenders

Proposals should be submitted electronically to Jade Yap at [jyap@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto: jyap@mentalhealth.org.uk) by 5pm on **Wednesday 4th August**. If you have any questions, please send them to the same address by 5pm on Wednesday 28th July and we will do our best to get back to you.