Lindsay Leg Clubs and social prescribing: Leg Clubs at the Cardiff Business School Breakfast Briefing

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In May 2023, the Leg Club Foundation further solidified its interdisciplinary collaboration with other organisations to raise the profile of the Leg Clubs and to reinforce the link between their activities and social prescribing. Social prescribing refers to the use of social activities as a way of helping improve individuals' physical and social wellbeing. On the morning of 23 May 2023, Professor Ellie Lindsay OBE presented her work at the Cardiff Business School Breakfast Briefing—a hybrid event that brings together policy makers, academics, practitioners and members of the public—to discuss the potential of the Leg Clubs to contribute to the drive towards social prescribing. The panel of presenters consisted of Lynne Neagle MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing for Wales, who discussed the recent National Framework for Social Prescribing consultation exercise in Wales; Rebecca Fawcett, Ray of Light Wales, who shared her experiences of social prescribing when working on crafts with individuals affected by cancer; and Dr Anna Galazka from Cardiff Business School, who joined Professor Ellie Lindsay OBE, specifically discussing how Leg Club volunteering can be an emergent form of social prescribing.

The psychosocial prescribing Leg Club model embraces the significant issues of isolation, loneliness and the ability to empower individuals through knowledge of their condition and its treatment, with a very direct involvement in their own care. It is far more than simply the provision of lower limb care, although this is paramount; rather, it is a social model that seeks to address the myriad of issues that individuals face. This dynamic process aims to meet the health needs of a society of older people, based on collaborative working relationships across professional boundaries, sharing responsibilities and giving those in our care improved access to services. Promoting a person-centred approach gives individuals the confidence to contribute as a participant in their care and promotes a sense of ownership and involvement.

The psychosocial Leg Club model for lower limb care is truly person-centred, valuing and listening to individuals and treating them with compassion, dignity and respect. Person-centred models have been shown to enhance adherence to treatment and contribute to improved healthcare outcomes. The Leg Club paradigm is based on this and emphasises:

- Wellness and maintenance of health
- Places equal emphasis on social health
- Skilled communication
- Prevention of depression and the development of an community
- How members think and feel, rather than what they do or have done to them!

This approach contributes to the positive outcomes that can be achieved by members of their Leg Clubs through empathy and peer support. Leg Clubs are places where people can meet up and befriend others similar in age and in health concerns to themselves, to exchange advice on looking after leg health, as well as chat about recipes, football or which local barber is best. After the Leg Club, they can return home feeling uplifted by human contact. Some meaningful ties have also formed in the Leg Clubs, including friendships and romance!

The potential of the Leg Clubs to help people form human connections is important, especially in times when the rates of chronic illness, loneliness and isolation are very high. According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, 25 million people in the UK admit to being feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes or often. Many of the Leg Club members love their Club experience so much that they become volunteers.

Leg Club volunteering may not be formally labelled as social prescribing, but many of the activities that it entails and the effects it has on people undertaking them places volunteering clearly on the social prescribing landscape. Volunteers organise and run their Leg Club, raise money to pay for venue rents and refreshments, organise social activities for the members, help nurses in their work, or even drive members to and from the Leg Club. Leg Clubs cannot be successful without their volunteers, but it is not just the members whose well-being improves—volunteers benefit from social activities they conduct, too.

As Dr Anna Galazka explained in her presentation, older adults' mental health is a hidden challenge in the society. However, Leg Club volunteering can support older individuals by giving them access to a range of social and creative activities that can help them build social support networks, stop mental health conditions worsening and improve well-being. Giving oneself to the community can make

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volunteers less anxious and depressed. These benefits are best captured through volunteers' narratives, which clearly reaffirm the positive impacts of their social engagements. To warrant this connection, in the Breakfast Briefing, Dr Anna Galazka shared the findings from her research aimed at understanding the innovative potential of Leg Club volunteering in Spring 2022. For example, as one volunteer admitted:

'I did go through a bad patch…I got put on some antidepressants. And then, I came here and it's totally different. You know, even people said, I'm a totally different person now, you know, which I am and it's thanks to this, you know.'

Leg Clubs are social nuclei of community life. Through bringing together members, nurses and volunteers, Leg Clubs encourage a communal orientation towards patients' collective emancipation from the sick role, and from a sense of loneliness, social isolation and stigmatisation. Leg Clubs, as social prescribers, are alternative organisations premised on the principles of respect for autonomy, responsibility to others and ongoing commitment to individual and collective flourishing (Parker et al, 2014). **CWC**

Parker M, Cheney G, Fournier V, Land C. The Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization. London: Routledge; 2014

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