



RECETAS

Re-imagining Environments for Connection
and Engagement: Testing Actions for Social
Prescribing in Natural Spaces

The RECETAS project

How Nature-Based Social Prescribing can alleviate loneliness?

Solutions to combat loneliness and promote emotional well-being among vulnerable urban adults.



RECETAS: transdisciplinary research

Co-creating, implementing, and evaluating
Nature-Based Social Prescribing (NBSP) solutions.

A transdisciplinary research approach integrating
social, behavioral, health, and natural sciences.

€5.4M

EU Funded Project (Horizon 2020 Programme)

March 2021 – June 2026

Coordinated by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)

50+ Scientists **13** Institutions **7+** Disciplines

9 Countries involved in
Europe, Latin America, and Australia



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 945095

An International

6 pilot sites implementing & testing the interventions:
Marseille, Barcelona, Prague, Helsinki, Melbourne, Cuenca.
+ 3 technical expert sites

Europe



Spain

- Project leader: Barcelona Institute for Global Health
- UVIC Central University of Catalunya
- Public Health Agency of Catalunya
- Foundation for Health and Ageing

France

- Agency for Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories (AViTeM)
- Marseille Public University Hospital System

England

- University of West England

Austria

- University for Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology

Czech Republic

- Charles University

Finland

- University of Helsinki

America



Ecuador

- University of Cuenca

United States

- Visible Network Labs

Oceania



Australia

- RMIT University



RECETAS Ecosystem of Stakeholders

Local & international actors

Public health, healthcare, social prescribing, nature, NGO, and research sectors

Inclusive, community-driven solutions Collaborative dialogue & collective intelligence



- **Knowledge sharing** of local and sectoral expertise.
- **Engagement** of practitioners and participants.
- **Knowledge transfer** to amplify project reach and impact.



Loneliness is a Global Public Health Crisis

Loneliness is recognised as a major social determinant of health, associated with serious diseases and early mortality.

Research shows that chronic loneliness can shorten life expectancy (with effects comparable to those of smoking or obesity).

- > An important precursor to chronic diseases and mental health disorders.
- > A consequence of poor social and economic conditions.

Targeted structural and person-centred interventions can make a difference.



Loneliness by the Numbers



Loneliness affects individuals from all genders and ages. Risk is greatest among vulnerable and marginalised populations (as are recent immigrants, young parents, LGBTQIA+ and economically and socially isolated communities).

13%
France

Feel lonely on a near-daily basis

15%
Australia

Aged 15+ experience loneliness (HILDA 2023)

12.6%
Barcelona

Loneliness prevalence doubled since 2020

22%
Prague

Of adults over 50s feel lonely occasionally

28%
Cuenca

Of older adults report loneliness

20%
France

Young people aged 15-29 reported feeling lonely in 2021

30%
Europe

Of community dwelling older adults suffer from loneliness

54%
Helsinki

Of older adults living in assisted living facilities suffer from loneliness



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What Is Nature-Based Social Prescribing (NBSP)?



A non-medical, community-based referral approach that connects individuals with nature-based experiences, services and resources.

Transforming nature into a tangible health and social asset.



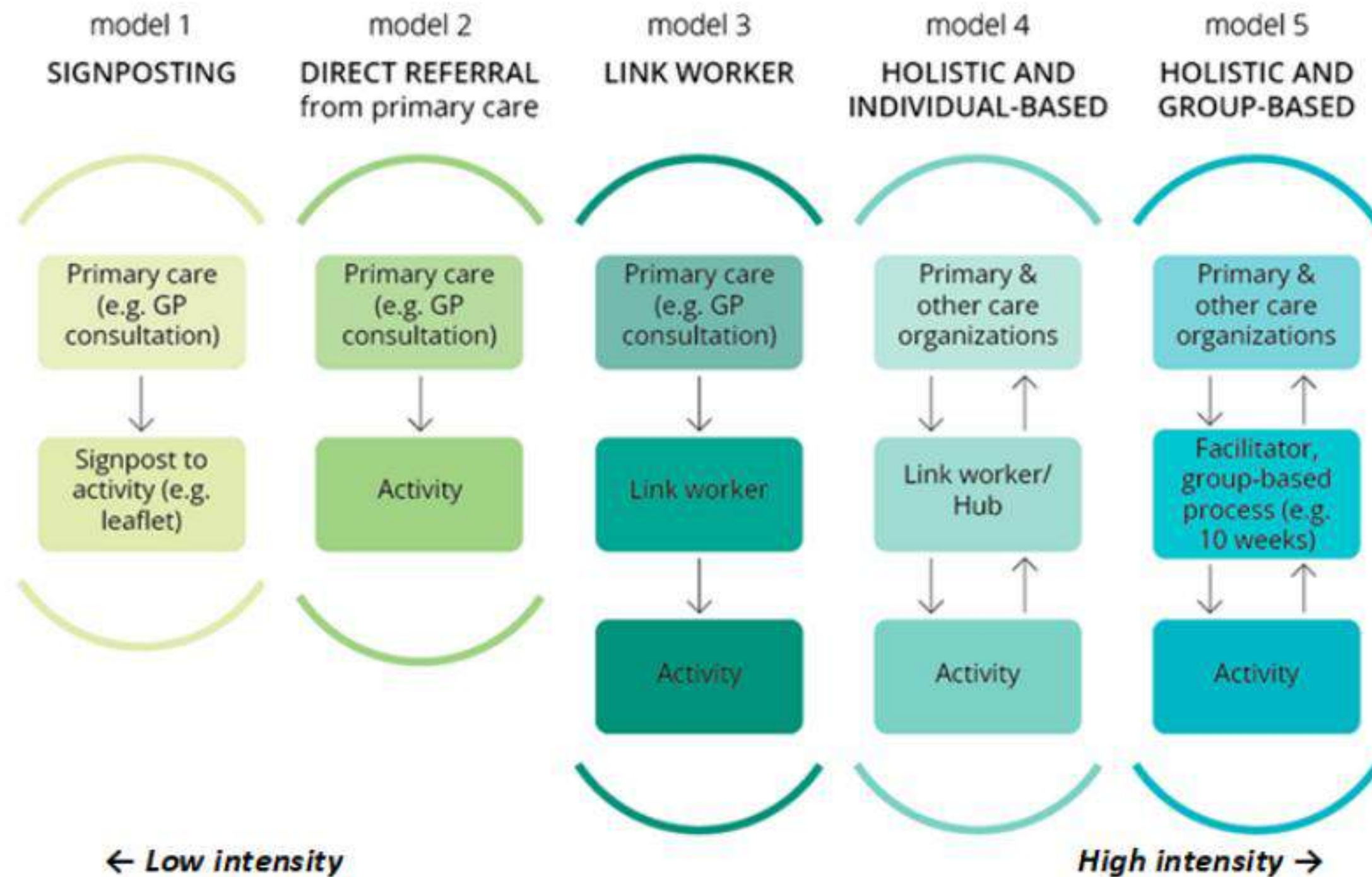
Community gardening, park walks, hiking, conservation efforts, sketching, birdwatching, nature writing, and much more.

NBSP is **adaptable to diverse populations and health needs**

Aligned with the **One Health & Planetary Health** frameworks.



5 Models of Social Prescribing



RECETAS created a model 5 “Holistic and Group-Based” and compared it to an active signposting intervention (model 3) in 2 of 3 RCTs

Litt, JS, Coll-Planas, L., Sachs, A., Masó Aguado, M., Howarth, M., (2023). Current Trends and Future Directions in Urban Social Prescribing, Current Environmental Health Reports



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The Healing Power of Nature

Exposure to Green Spaces

Reduces stress, anxiety, depression
Improves cardiovascular health and cognitive function
Boosts overall well-being

Mechanisms

Rooted in biological and psychological processes, such as lowering cortisol (the stress hormone), restoring attention, promoting human capabilities.

Addressing Loneliness

Foster informal social interactions
Group activities for shared purpose & bonding

Fostering a nature connection is a public health necessity, especially for vulnerable populations.



Friends in Nature (FiN) intervention

The Friends in Nature (FiN) method is a nature-based social prescribing intervention designed to alleviate loneliness and promote social connection across diverse urban populations.



Friends in Nature (FiN)

A flexible method designed to alleviate loneliness. FiN is adaptable to diverse communities, environments, and contexts. It fosters connection, empowerment, and well-being through nature- and group-based approaches.

The FiN approach combines:

Social prescribing

Group Dynamics

Nature connection

FiN is rooted in **Nature-Based Social Prescribing (NBSP)**, a non-medical, community-driven approach that connects individuals to nature-based experiences to enhance mental, physical, and social well-being.

Trained facilitators
ensure cultural sensitivity,
accessibility,
and group continuity

Peer support
+ nature-based experiences
chosen by participants

Inspired by the Finnish Circle of Friends® model,
FiN translates NBSP into a concrete model:



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GROUP PROCESSES
Empowering participants and fostering meaningful connections.

- Agreeing on activities together
- Establishing secure and open group dialogue
- Creating opportunities for connections and social interactions.
- Motivational interviewing and empowerment letters
- Dedicated time to celebrate together

NATURE BASED EXPERIENCES
Nature as the roots to build connections

- Shared experiences
- Sensory connections to the environment (taste, smell, sight, touch and sound)
- Creative activities
- Creating new memories and reconnecting with cherished moments from the past

The FiN Recipe: a synergy of ingredients for change

SKILLED FACILITATION
Trained facilitators support the group process, emphasizing individual and collective strengths.

- Partnering with primary care and community organizations.
- Facilitating a balanced and inclusive group environment.
- Encouraging independence of the group beyond the intervention.

Directions

Mix the ingredients to create synergy (group processes, skilled facilitation, and nature-based activities).



Simmer for 10 weeks, with 2-hour meetings per week.



Servings of empowerment, connection, and transformation.

The Nature dose formula

Experiences in natural settings where sensory connections awaken a sense of belonging and provide meaningful and shared experiences. Nature becomes a "third facilitator".



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Changing lives: what we learned

FiN fosters meaningful connections to nature, others, and oneself.
It is adaptable to diverse contexts and for populations with different needs.

Intrapersonal benefits

Greater empowerment, self-efficacy, confidence, enjoyment of daily life, and alleviation of loneliness.

Interpersonal benefits

Strengthened peer support, deeper relatedness, stronger social ties, and confidence building.

Mental well-being

Reduced loneliness, anxiety, and pain; improved sleep, mood, cognition, and subjective well-being.

Long term health and quality of life benefits

Sustained improvements in mental, physical, and social well-being.

Nature contact and pro-environmental health behaviors

Increased time in nature, physical activity, awareness and value of nearby natural settings.



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6 Pilot Cities, measuring change

Research studies testing and evaluating the FiN approach across Europe, Latin America and Australia.



 Cuenca

 Barcelona

 Marseille

 Helsinki

 Melbourne

 Prague

**1200 participants
worldwide**

REDUCTION IN LONELINESS

FiN reduced loneliness at 3 months, with sustained or improved results at 6–12 months, while boosting emotional wellbeing and nature connectedness.

Cuenca	- Reduced loneliness - Effectiveness in both community and institutional settings
Barcelona	- Loneliness alleviated at 10 weeks - Continued improvements at 6 and 12 months - Economic effectiveness and social return on investment
Marseille	25% reduction in loneliness 11% improvement in mental wellbeing
Helsinki	- Loneliness shifted from severe to moderate - Increased belonging and confidence
Melbourne	- Loneliness shifted from severe to moderate - Increased belonging and confidence
Prague	- Reduced loneliness among older adults - Reduced depression at 6 and 12 months, improved perceived social support, and quality of life - Economic effectiveness demonstrated

Cost-Effectiveness for the Healthcare System

The FiN intervention is cost-effective.

Over the 1-year trial period, it generates social value, and suggests potential for good long-term value for money.



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Health Economic Analyses of Friends in Nature interventions



- **Cost-effective:** over a 1-year trial period.
- **Long-term value:** strong value for money beyond the trial.
- **Social return on investment:** positive social value.

Health economics of the FiN approach is supporting its potential to reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing.

An Action Plan:



Barcelona

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 320 participants
- Adults in socio-economically disadvantaged urban areas
- Randomised controlled trial comparing facilitator-led, group intervention (treatment) and active signposting (active control)

RESULTS (AS OF JUNE 30, 2026)

- Reduced loneliness, improved emotional wellbeing, cost-effective (Coll-Planas et al., in review).
- Social return of €1.48 per €1 invested (Papon et al., 2026).

More Info

- [RECETAS in Barcelona](#)

Cuenca

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 60 participants
- Urban older-adult institutions
- Quasi-experimental study

RESULTS

- Reduced loneliness, improved wellbeing, stronger social ties, sense of belonging, environmental awareness.

UCUENCA

 RECETAS

More Info

- [RECETAS in Cuenca](#)



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Helsinki

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 319 participants
- Lonely older adults (mean age 83) in 22 assisted living facilities
- Randomised controlled trial comparing facilitator-led, group intervention (treatment) and usual care (control)

RESULTS

- Reduced loneliness, improved sleep and wellbeing, stronger social ties, sense of belonging, environmental awareness.
- Read more: [Helsinki Scientific Publications](#)

More Info

- [RECETAS in Helsinki](#)



Marseille

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 60 participants
- Adults living in deprived urban districts
- Mixed-methods approach with qualitative evaluations (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative data collection

RESULTS

- Loneliness decreased by 25%, mental wellbeing improved by 11%, connection with nature improved by 23%

More Info

- [RECETAS in Marseille](#)

Melbourne

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 37 participants
- Adults identifying as LGBTQIA+ refugees, and asylum seekers
- Quasi-experimental pre-post study, mixed methods

RESULTS

- A MEANINGFUL REDUCTION IN loneliness from severe to moderate levels, increased nature connectedness, and qualitative evidence of improved wellbeing, belonging, and confidence.

More Info

- [RECETAS in Melbourne](#)



Prague

RECETAS pilot

FRIENDS IN NATURE INTERVENTIONS

- 322 participants
- Older adults (60+) in urban areas
- Randomised controlled trial comparing facilitator-led, group intervention (treatment) and active signposting (active control)

RESULTS

- DEMONSTRATED REDUCTIONS IN loneliness, improved wellbeing and social connection, reduced depression, improved perceived social support



CHARLES UNIVERSITY



More Info

- [RECETAS in Prague](#)

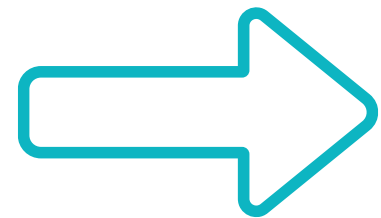


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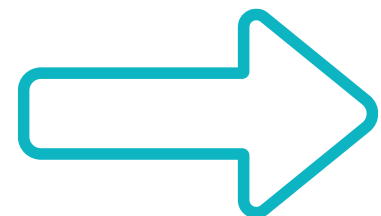


From Evidence to Action: Policy Recommendations

A set of lessons after five years of transdisciplinary research:



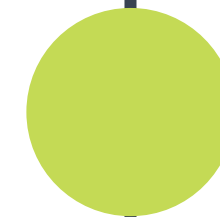
A policy roadmap and recommendations for integrating NBSP into public health systems, at local, national, international levels.



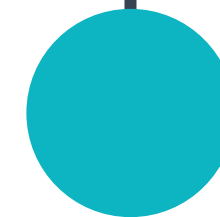
More about the RECETAS Policy Roadmap



Identify loneliness as a public health priority



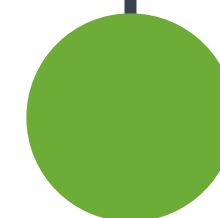
Advance nature-friendly policies to support nature connection



Integrate NBSP as an evidence based solution



Develop the workforce to enhance capacity



Support multisectoral partnerships & invest in co-creation





- HOME
- EVENT LIST
- USERS**
- NOTIFICATIONS
- MESSAGES



A NBSP Digital Platform Connecting Nature & Community

Facilitators and civil society organisations

> Providing a curated set of NBSP activities

Health and care professionals, community services, etc.

> Prescribing NBSP

Individuals

> Taking part in NBSP activities/events

FiN SaaS supports online and in-person group care by creating a multifaceted connected care ecosystem, bridging screening, remote and in-person provider interaction, facilitator-led group intervention, and continuous health monitoring



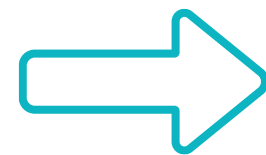
Becoming a Friends in Nature (FiN) Group Facilitator

A practical and theoretical training programme on
loneliness, social prescribing, and nature-based solutions.

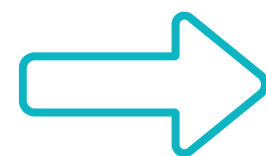
Training Programme Key Focus



Theory: Loneliness, social prescribing, group dynamics, empowerment, and risk assessment.



Practice: Co-create nature-based activities, conduct interviews, write empowerment letters, and facilitate group sessions (8–12 participants, 9+ weeks).



Support: Mentoring, learning diaries, feedback, and peer collaboration.

**Certified
facilitators
equipped to help
individuals find
connection,
autonomy, and
wellbeing through
nature-based group
interventions.**



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Connection is in Our Nature

RECETAS DOCUMENTARY

TRAILER |

CONNECTION

IS IN  OUR

NATURE

Follow study participants and researchers of the RECETAS project as they confront loneliness and the healing power of nature in our cities.

A film by Robin Cox.

[Contact us](#)
[Organize a screening](#)
[in your city](#)

Follow us into the next phase

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