

Part of
the Warm
Welcome
Spaces
Inclusion
Toolkit

Partnership Development Guide

Building relationships that increase
inclusion and reach

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"We are open and welcoming to everyone... we've folks from all walks of life... wealthy and homeless, young and old... professional and others with learning disabilities... all the colours of the neurodiverse spectrum, adults and children... all faiths and no faith... there's pancakes and cakes, teas and good coffee for everyone. We don't charge... there's games and crafts and telly and endless talking."
Warm Welcome Spaces Volunteer

Why Partnerships Matter for Inclusion

One of the biggest barriers to inclusion is simple: people don't know your space exists. The communities who could benefit most, from isolated parents, refugees, multicultural communities, people with disabilities, those experiencing loneliness - are often the hardest to reach through conventional marketing.

Partnerships solve this. When a health visitor mentions your space to a struggling new mum, when a social prescriber refers someone experiencing loneliness, when a refugee support worker brings a family for their first visit - these personal connections cut through in ways that posters and social media cannot.

Good partnerships also bring expertise you don't have. You don't need to become specialists in every area of inclusion. Instead, you can work with organisations who already understand specific communities and can help you get it right.

What the consultation told us:

Partnership working was consistently identified as the most effective approach for reaching underrepresented groups. Spaces that had built strong referral relationships reported significantly more diverse visitors than those relying on general marketing alone.



Partnership Priorities at a Glance

Not all partnerships are equal. Some will transform who walks through your door; others are nice-to-have. Focus your limited time on the partnerships most likely to increase inclusion.

Where to start; most important partnership links

Social Prescribers / Link Workers: Direct referrals of isolated, lonely, or struggling individuals.

Health Visitors: Reach isolated new parents, especially those with postnatal difficulties.

Refugee and Asylum Support Organisations: Trusted bridge to communities who may be wary of new spaces.

Local Council (Community Development): Referrals, funding intelligence, inclusion in local directories.

Faith Communities (other than your own): Cross-community bridge-building.

Build when ready

Family Hubs / Children's Centres: Reach families with young children, especially vulnerable families.

Citizens Advice: Can deliver sessions in your space; refer people needing community.

GP Practices: Display your materials; some have in-house social prescribers.

Food Banks - Reach people in financial hardship who may also be isolated.

Worth exploring when capacity allows

Housing Associations - Reach tenants who may be isolated or in fuel poverty.

Age UK / Local Age Charities - Reach isolated older people.

Disability Organisations - Guidance on accessibility; reach disabled community members.

Schools and Colleges - Reach families; potential young volunteers.

Employers / Job Centres - Reach people experiencing unemployment or work-related isolation.

Partner Profiles: Who to Approach and How

The following profiles give you everything you need to approach each type of partner. Use these as a starting point and adapt to your local context.

Social Prescribers / Link Workers

Who they are: Social prescribers work within or alongside GP practices. They support people whose health is affected by social factors - loneliness, isolation, stress, lack of community connection. Instead of medication, they 'prescribe' community activities and support.

Why partner with them: They see exactly the people you want to reach: isolated, lonely, often anxious about trying new things. A personal referral from a trusted professional can be the push someone needs to walk through your door.

How to find them: Contact your local Primary Care Network (PCN) - this is the group of GP practices in your area. Ask for the social prescribing lead.

What to say: "We run a Warm Welcome Space and we'd love to be somewhere you can refer people who would benefit from community connection. Could we meet for 15 minutes so I can tell you what we offer?"

Important note:

Social prescribers refer people but usually cannot accompany them. This means your welcome process needs to be strong enough to make that first visit comfortable for someone arriving alone and anxious. Consider offering to meet first-time referrals at the door. Sometimes, having someone ring them and help them plan their journey, or be prepared to meet them outside, can help break down the nerves of 'going somewhere by themselves'.

Health Visitors

Who they are: Health visitors are specialist nurses who support families with children under five. They visit all new parents and provide ongoing support to those who need it, including families experiencing postnatal depression, isolation, domestic abuse, or poverty.

Why partner with them: They have trusted relationships with exactly the families who might benefit most from your space but who are often too overwhelmed or anxious to find you themselves. A recommendation from a health visitor carries real weight.

How to find them: Contact your local health visiting service through the NHS trust or local authority. You can also ask at children's centres or family hubs, who often work closely with health visitors.

What to say: "We're a Warm Welcome Space that welcomes families with babies and young children. We'd love to give you some information to share with parents who might benefit from getting out of the house and connecting with others, or struggling with heating their homes."

Refugee and Asylum Support Organisations

Who they are: These may be local charities, branches of national organisations (like Refugee Action or the Red Cross), or council resettlement teams. They support refugees and asylum seekers with housing, legal issues, integration, and wellbeing.

Why partner with them: Refugees and asylum seekers are often living in fuel poverty, deeply isolated, and disconnected from community. But they may be wary of unfamiliar spaces. Support workers can provide a trusted bridge, sometimes accompanying people on their first visit.

How to find them: Search for refugee support in your area, or contact your local council's resettlement team. Local faith organisations often have connections too. Approach with humility - ask what would be helpful rather than assuming.

What to say: "We run a Warm Welcome Space and we want to make sure refugees and asylum seekers in our community know they're welcome. Could we learn from you about how to do this well, and explore whether we could be useful for people you support?"

Local Council - Community Development Team

Who they are: Most councils have staff focused on community development, voluntary sector support, or social inclusion. Job titles vary - look for community development officers, voluntary sector liaison, or neighbourhood coordinators.

Why partner with them: Councils can include you in local directories (so professionals know you exist), refer residents directly, alert you to funding opportunities, and connect you with other services. They often know which communities are most underserved.

How to find them: Start with your council's website - look for sections on community, voluntary sector, or 'cost of living' support. You can also contact your local councillor and ask them to connect you to the right officer. Some Councils also fund local organisations providing cost of living support under their funding.

What to say: "We run a Warm Welcome Space and we want to make sure we're reaching people who could benefit. Could you help us understand who's most in need locally, and how we can connect with the services that support them?"



Family Hubs / Children's Centres

Who they are: Family hubs (formerly children's centres in many areas) provide services for families with children aged 0-19, and up to 25 for young people with learning disabilities. They offer activities, parenting support, health services, and family support workers who help families in difficulty.

Why partner with them: They work with families who are struggling - those who might most benefit from additional community connection. Family support workers can refer families to you and help them feel confident about attending.

How to find them: Search for 'family hub' or 'children's centre' plus your area. Your local authority website should list them. Some areas have transformed children's centres into family hubs; others still use the old name.

What to say: "We're a family-friendly Warm Welcome Space and we'd love to be somewhere you can suggest to families who might benefit. Could we come and tell you about what we offer?"

Citizens Advice

Who they are: Citizens Advice provides free, confidential advice on debt, benefits, housing, employment, and more. They see people at crisis points - often the same people experiencing isolation and fuel poverty.

Why partner with them: Partnership can work two ways: they can refer clients who need community connection, and they may be willing to run advice sessions in your space, bringing new visitors and adding value for existing ones.

How to find them: Search for Citizens Advice plus your area. Most have a local office you can contact. Some areas also have specialist advice services (e.g., debt advice, welfare rights) worth connecting with.

What to say: "We run a Warm Welcome Space and many of our visitors would benefit from advice support. Would you be interested in running a drop-in session here? We could also be somewhere you refer clients who need community connection."

How to Approach Partners Successfully

Before you make contact

- Be clear about what you're offering.
- Know your basics: opening times, location, what you provide, who currently attends.
- Think about what would make their job easier - how does partnership benefit them?
- Have materials ready to share (leaflet, website link, photos of your space).
- Consider what you can realistically commit to - don't over promise.

Making the first approach

Email is usually best for initial contact, it lets busy professionals respond when they can. Keep it short: who you are, why you're getting in touch, and a specific ask (usually a brief meeting or call).

After the meeting

Send a brief thank-you email summarising what you discussed

- Follow through on anything you promised - quickly.
- Provide whatever materials or information they need to refer to you.
- Make it easy: give them a simple way to describe your space to clients.
- Stay in touch - a quarterly update keeps you on their radar.

What You Can Offer Partners

Good partnerships are mutual. Think about what you bring to the table:

You can offer...	Which helps them...
A welcoming space their clients can be referred to.	Have somewhere to suggest when people need community connection.
Feedback on how their referrals are doing (with consent).	Evidence that their referrals are making a difference.
A venue for them to run sessions or meet clients.	Reach people in an informal, non-intimidating setting.
Promotion of their services to your visitors.	Extend their reach to people who need them.
Stories and case studies (anonymised) for their reporting.	Demonstrate impact to their funders and commissioners.
A friendly face at community events and networks.	Build their own networks and local knowledge.

Hosting Partner Services in Your Space

One powerful form of partnership is inviting services to deliver sessions in your space. This brings new visitors through your door and adds value for existing ones.

Services that work well in Warm Welcome Spaces

- Citizens Advice drop-ins - benefits, debt, housing advice.
- Social prescriber office hours - so visitors can self-refer.
- Digital skills sessions - helping people get online.
- Health checks - blood pressure, NHS health MOTs.
- Form-filling support - benefits applications, housing forms.
- ESOL conversation practice - for speakers of other languages.
- Pension or benefits surgeries - especially around Universal Credit.
- Energy advice - switching tariffs, grants, reducing bills.
- Legal advice clinics - some law firms offer pro-bono sessions.

Maintaining Partnerships Over Time

Building a partnership is just the start. Keeping it alive takes ongoing attention - but not as much as you might think.

Simple ways to stay connected

- Send a brief quarterly email: what's new, any success stories, upcoming events.
- Invite partners to your special events or celebrations.
- Share (anonymised) stories of how their referrals are getting on.
- Ask for feedback: is the partnership working for them? What could be better?
- Update them promptly if your opening times or offer changes.
- Thank them, a card at Christmas or a mention in your newsletter goes a long way.
- Meet annually to review: is this still working? What should we do differently?

When partnerships go quiet

Staff change. Priorities shift. Partnerships that started well can fade. If referrals dry up or communication stops:

- Don't take it personally, it's usually about their workload, not you.
- Reach out with a low-pressure check in: "Just wanted to make sure you know we're still here".
- Ask if there's a new contact person you should connect with.
- Offer something new, a visit, updated materials, a specific invitation.
- Accept that some partnerships have a natural lifespan and that's okay.

Your Partnership Action Plan

Use these pages to plan your partnership development. Focus on one or two priority partnerships at a time. It's better to build a few strong relationships than spread yourself too thin.

Our priority communities to reach

Which groups are currently underrepresented in your space?

Who would benefit most from attending?

1.
2.
3.

Priority partnerships to develop

Based on who you want to reach, which partnerships should you focus on first?

Partner type	Specific organisation / contact to approach

First steps - what we'll do this month

1.
2.
3.

Who in our team will lead on partnership development?

.....

Next review date:

.....

Notes:



www.warmwelcome.uk
info@warmwelcome.uk



The Warm Welcome Campaign is hosted by the Good Faith Foundation, a charity focused on cross-sector collaboration for social inclusion. Registered Charity No 1188639

Registered office: Warm Welcome, The Courtyard, High Street, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7HP