

ICPOP Mayo Community Connector Michelle Prendergast & Marie Alexander

Community Connector & ICPPOP Operational Lead

Introduction

Ireland's first Community connector joined Mayo Integrated Care Program for Older People in January 2023. Similar to social prescribing, the Community Connector is a specialist service with a focused approach on older people who are patients of the ICPPOP service. The Community Connector supports adults over the age of 75 years with complex needs by integrating them into community groups and organisations of their choice through coaching and support to increase their social connectedness. It empowers the older person to find their own solutions in a supportive way. This has been viewed as the missing link between the health sector and the older person living well in the community. The work is done through a person centred approach by working with the person in their home and in the community for a period of 6 weeks. It's a tailored response to an unmet need.

It has been recognised that a high number of people over 65 years' experience loneliness and social isolation (Giebel et al., 2022). It is estimated that 20% of consults with the GP are for social reasons and not a clinical reason (Kimberlee et al., 2017). Whilst GP's are well equipped to deal with social appointments, in an effort to relieve clinical work load pressures and link the medical sector with the community, the community connector role was established.

Mayo has one of the largest populations of adults over the age of 65 years in the third largest county in Ireland. The community connector works alongside the ICPPOP team in the hub in Castlebar and attends satellite clinics with the team to meet the needs of the older person in their community. The Community Connector connects older people in with community groups, services and organisations in their locality to reduce social isolation and increase connection to their community.

Aim's & Objectives

Aims:

- To identify the unmet social needs and identify any barriers that may prevent the person from addressing the needs
- To reintegrate the person back into the community
- To reduce social isolation and loneliness
- To keep the older person living well at home and improve their health, well-being and social support

Objectives:

- Using a person centred approach, the Community Connector builds a relationship with the person and support them to identify interests in the community
- Using a well-being plan, the Community Connector draws a plan with the older person so there is a focus and a goal to work towards
- Where the older person may be more hesitant to join a new group, the community connector coaches the older person by attending the group alongside them to increase their confidence and comfortableness within the new setting.

Patient's feedback

- "Going to the group is like forgetting all the troubles I have, thanks to you"

- "Working with Community Connector was brilliant, she told me things that I can do and go to and how to keep myself well"

- "I had an excellent experience, the group made a great fuss out of me and I wouldn't have gone without the community connector"

- "It helped me get my confidence back, It was the first time I had received Communion at the Alter in a long time because I felt more courageous because she was with me. My old comrades had missed me and I got a good response when I went back".

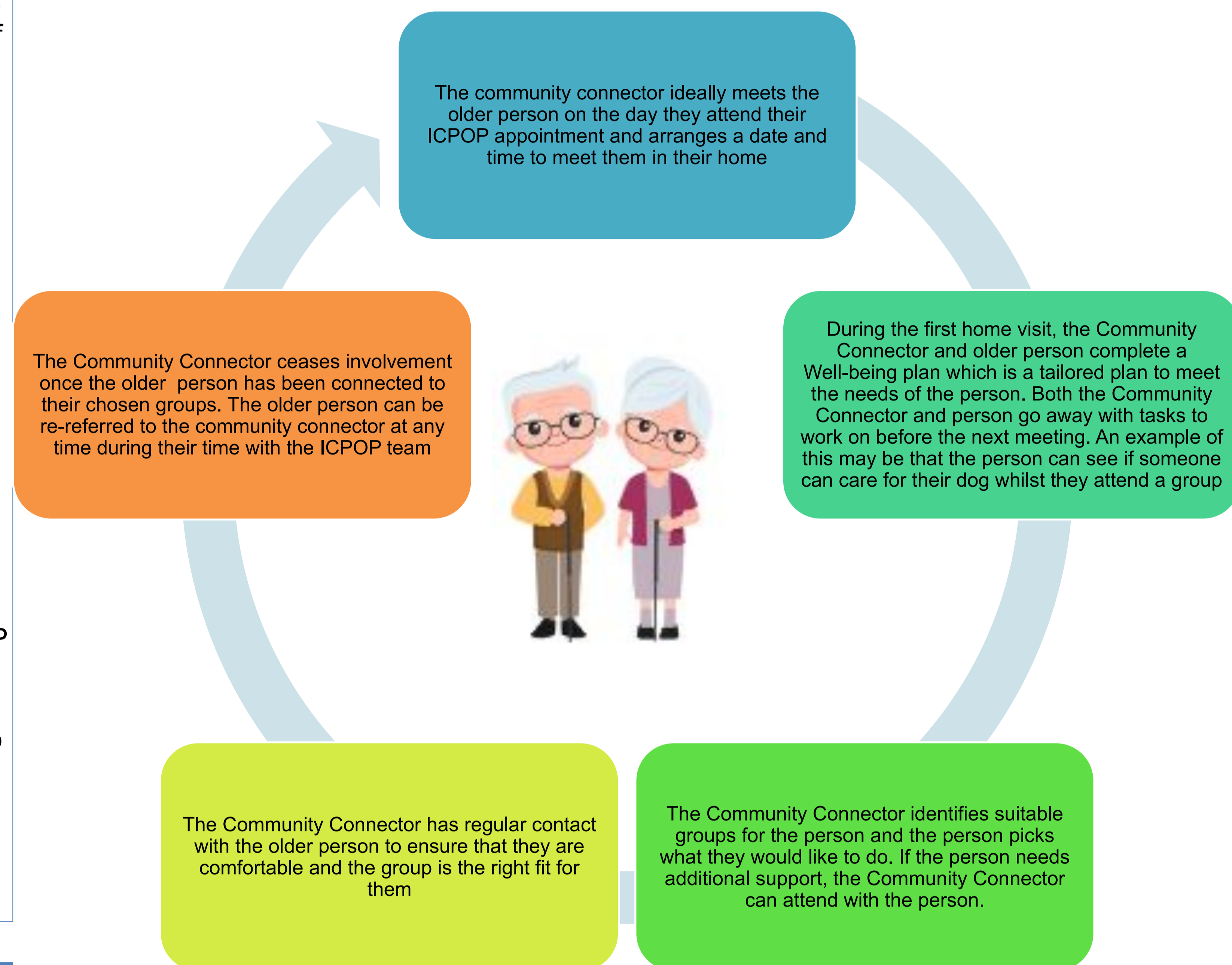
References:

-Giebel, C., Hassan, S., Harvey, G., Devitt, C., Harper, L. and Simmill-Binning, C., 2022. Enabling middle-aged and older adults accessing community services to reduce social isolation: Community Connectors. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(2), pp.e461-e468.

-Kimberlee, R., Polley, M., Bertotti, M., Pilkington, K. and Refsum, C., 2017. A review of the evidence assessing impact of social prescribing on healthcare demand and cost implications.

Patient's journey

Following a patients geriatric assessment by an ICPPOP staff member, the older person can be referred to the Community Connector.



Outcomes

The outcomes of Community Connector involvement has varied. The Warwick Edinburgh Scale is utilised to aid the measurement of outcomes for the older person as well as ICPPOP team metrics. Some people have required tailored signposting to specific groups whilst others require coaching and additional support from the Community Connector. Here are some examples of outcomes from people who have engaged with the community connector:

-A lady who was socially isolated through a recent fall and had bereavement is now attending a day centre and attending group grief counselling. This has increased her independence and her social circle.

-A man who was socially isolated due to a fall attended a day centre for lunch and built his confidence to go to mass after Community Connector attended with him. He has enjoyed the warm response he got from his friends when he returned going for lunch and enjoyed people telling him that they missed him.

-A lady had been confined to her house for years due to illness was supported to attend her local shop for the first time in 8 years and went to a day centre. This was co-worked with the Occupational Therapy Assistant.

-A man who was previously very social & musical had stopped attending groups due to anxiety and cognitive decline. Community Connector attended a local day centre with him which he now wants to attend twice per week. There has been an increase of 9 from his initial Warwick Edinburgh Scale and reports that Community Connector found a "particular good place" for him.

-A lady who moved to Ireland to be closer to her family member with no connections her own age now attends to day centre and is connected to the local knitting group. She is really enjoying her new group and making connections in her new community.