

Dr Alison Dawson, Co-Leader, Dementia and Ageing Research, University of Stirling

DR ALISON DAWSON is a Senior Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the University of Stirling's Centre for Environment, Dementia and Ageing Research (CEDAR). Alison has worked on a range of UK-based and international research projects with the overarching goals of better understanding the challenges of ageing and of living with cognitive change and dementia and supporting and enabling people to live their best possible lives. She a Co-Investigator on three recently funded projects: *The impact of COVID-19 Fear: evidence to inform social, health and economic recovery - a Healthy Ageing In Scotland (HAGIS) study* (2021) funded via the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) COVID19 Open Call, and two projects funded as part of the UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge Social, Behavioural and Design Research Programme: *Connectivity and Digital Design for Health and Well-being Across Generations, Places and Spaces* (2021) and *Designing homes for healthy cognitive ageing: co-production for impact and scale (DesHCA)* (2021).

'Technology and Social Connectedness: implications for social prescription.'

My name is Alison Dawson, I'm a Senior Research Fellow and the Director of CEDAR at the University of Stirling. What I want to talk about is technology and social connectedness, and how that has implications for social prescribing. To give you an idea of where this is going, we're going to question that availability of service and interventions, and how that is a key challenge, and the potential for online services to overcome peri pandemic challenges to provision access, and to ameliorate postcode lotteries in service provision. I will talk about the challenges that remain to be addressed, and to give encouragement about resources that are available to guide online service development and talk about one I have been involved in.

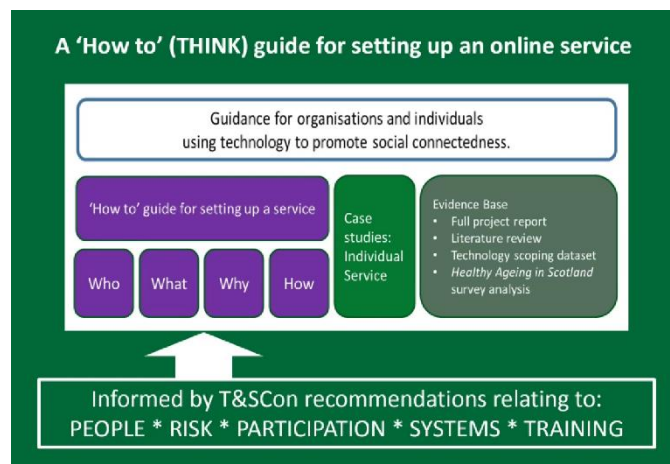
The first thing to talk about is looking beyond lockdown to potential challenges downstream. One of the big challenges is going to be not just the availability of places for arts-based intervention, but also some of the ways the pandemic will affect people's confidence to use those places and spaces. I think that is one of the ways in which digital services might be helpful for us. I am involved in a project, my colleague Elaine Douglas is principal investigator for that, which is going to look at the ways in which people's fears, concerns, anxieties, and feeling of unease means they're less willing to go out and use services in person than previously. In addition to those sorts of challenges, there are challenges which existed long before the pandemic in relation to digitising the services, those relating to digital access. The Office for National Statistics, *Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2020* (2020) suggests that at the beginning of

2020 96% of households had access to internet, but only 80% of households with one or more persons aged 65 or over had access. There are issues of access, issues around digital literacy, there are issues around service availability. You can see from a map of events from [A4D](#), it indicates that by just looking at Scotland, there isn't a consistent spread of services, they're very much concentrated in different places. Digital services could potentially overcome these postcode lottery issues.

There are attempts to address those challenges both top-down attempts through things like funding different organisations to support people to get online, that's the [Connecting Scotland](#) approach, and bottom-up approaches through [Community Makers](#), a network of community groups support people affected by dementia to reconnect during the COVID crisis. What I want to talk about is a resource developed just before the pandemic, a project that I was involved in, it finished in November 2019, [Technology and social connectedness project 'TandSCon'](#) (2019). It looks towards potential technologies to address and ameliorate social isolation. But from that, we have produced evidence-based guidelines working with different stakeholder groups, which will be helpful for organisations thinking about how to think about setting up an online service. I urge you to look at the guidelines.



In relation to this, the plan, do, study, act cycle of process improvement - which will be familiar to many people in different health care settings - would be one of the ways in which to think about where our guidance could be useful. It is particularly useful for planning, how to think about setting up a guide, as opposed to doing these things and suddenly a service will appear. We need to ensure there is sufficient capacity if we want to make social prescribing of arts-based interventions a reality.



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Digital will need to be a part of that process. So that is a whistle stop tour, a pointer to one or two of those issues around SP, and how digital could affect that.

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