Winter Wellbeing is a pioneering multi-agency programme, providing practical help to vulnerable people at risk of preventable winter death or hospital admission due to cold, damp living conditions in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Building on the success of a pilot in 2011, the second phase of the programme ran between 1st November 2012 and 31st March 2013. This was a unique partnership of 29 organisations across the public, community, voluntary and private sector and is an excellent example of collaborative delivery, providing effective interventions while avoiding duplication and maximising long term benefits.

The programme utilised a single Freephone number, enabling householders to access multiple services, many of which had a profound impact on the lives of those reached. This ‘triage service’ was fundamental to the programme’s success, helping frontline workers understand the full range of services available, alleviating time constraints and capacity issues.

The elderly, low income families with young children, those with physical and mental illness, carers and disadvantaged people living in poor quality housing were targeted to receive much-needed help. As a direct result of interventions delivered, vulnerable people obtained immediate practical help with heaters, boilers, reducing fuel debt or emergency deliveries of oil and coal when they needed it most. For some, this provided immediate warmth to relieve or avert worsening of severe health conditions, for others it removed the anxiety of worrying about big fuel bills.

Winter Wellbeing has produced long and short term outcomes, alleviating immediate problems such as fuel debt and supporting householders, for example through preventative insulation measures, or employment support. This future-proofing of homes and incomes helps break the cycle of fuel poverty and will cushion householders against the impact of future price rises.

Despite Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly’s picturesque facade, poverty and deprivation are a grim reality faced by a growing number of householders. With rising energy bills placing further pressure on already stretched household budgets, the demand for Winter Wellbeing services is likely to increase.

The need for Winter Wellbeing

Although one in five households in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly currently live in what is termed ‘Fuel Poverty’, for some of the most disadvantaged people in our community winter is a life and death struggle. The Department of Health estimates that there are over 23,700 ‘Excess Winter Deaths’ in England each year and the annual cost to the NHS of treating winter related disease due to cold private housing is over £847 million. Many of these deaths are preventable as they are due to health conditions worsened as a result of vulnerable people living in cold, damp homes.

The nature of the housing stock and population demographic in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly makes the need for help and intervention even more pressing.

Summary

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The Winter Wellbeing Partnership

Lead Partners

- Community Energy Plus (Project Delivery Management)
- Cornwall Council & Council of the Isles of Scilly
- NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly (Public Health)

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- RVS
- Cornwall Council & Council of the Isles of Scilly
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The approach

Much of the success of Winter Wellbeing was rooted in the project’s all-encompassing multi-agency approach. This meant that one Freephone number, hosted by Community Energy Plus, could be used to access a range of services, acting as a triage point for onward referrals.

Multiple interventions were often essential to bring households back from crisis point. The success of this pioneering and effective model is reflected in 93% of Winter Wellbeing’s beneficiaries reporting that the programme benefitted them.

Another great strength of Winter Wellbeing was the project’s interaction with frontline workers, providing training and advice and facilitating future best practice in the sector. Winter Wellbeing engaged with 29 Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to provide greater awareness of fuel poverty and the possible interventions available.

Who we helped

By age:
- Under 50: 56.8%
- Aged 50-59: 17.1%
- Aged 60-69: 14.6%
- Aged 70-79: 7.9%
- Aged 80+: 3.5%

Household type:
- With young children: 20.9%
- With health problems: 36.5%
- Unemployed: 28.3%
- Unemployed with young children: 14.2%
Case study

Mr and Mrs Nicholls from South East Cornwall used a gas fire and plug-in heaters to heat their property, but their home was continually cold and damp. Mr Nicholls suffers with Emphysema and has difficulty breathing, a problem which was worsened by their cold home. A Hanover handyman visited the home and recommended they contact Winter Wellbeing about a heating system replacement.

“We applied for the grant available through the Fuel Poverty Fund, then a heating company came round and talked us through the new system and how it would work. They then installed a new gas central heating system.

“It has made a great difference to my husband’s breathing. He needs the temperature to be between 21 and 24°C and with the new central heating system I can ensure the temperature stays in that range. My husband’s breathing has much improved. He used to cough and have spasms because the house was damp and cold, but that doesn’t happen any longer.

“I would certainly recommend the service to others. We really appreciate the help. The house doesn’t feel damp any longer and my husband’s quality of life has improved no end.”

As part of the Winter Wellbeing service, Community Energy Plus also ensured that the Nicholls’ had adequate insulation, and made a referral to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau to review the couple’s benefit entitlements.

What we achieved

1553 Total number reached
721 Householders advised by phone
267 Home visits to provide energy advice
436 Households receiving practical measures
101 Workless households with children supported to return to paid work, volunteering or training
41 Rough sleepers into permanent accommodation
57 Emergency heaters provided
15 Heating repairs (average £139)
52 Heating improvements carried out (average £3,705)
22 Clearance of fuel debt (average £352)
113 Key meters topped up (average £196)
94 Help with current fuel bills (average £184)
67 Deliveries of heating oil (average £335)
19 Deliveries of coal
8 Deliveries of LPG and logs (average £169)
80 Loft and cavity insulation installed
3 Solid wall insulation installed

£72,627 Total emergency fund payments (average of £225 per household)
894 Households supported by at least 1 intervention
390 Households supported by multiple interventions

Spreading the message

Effective promotion of Winter Wellbeing, both directly to individuals who could be supported by the programme and through the effective network of frontline workers across the public, voluntary and community sectors, ensured that some of the most vulnerable members of our community experiencing genuine hardship engaged with the project.

The communications toolkit included

15,000 Winter Wellbeing Guides distributed through GP surgeries, health centres, job centres, one-stop shops and voluntary and community sector organisations.

190,000 Winter health referral postcards provided as a resource for frontline workers, GP surgeries and project partners.

editorial in local papers

launch coverage and further articles through winter on BBC Radio Cornwall and Spotlight.
“The service made a great difference to myself and my children as it was very cold weather and we had no heating or hot water as this is provided by oil of which we had none at all and no funds available to purchase any. We have a problem with damp in the property and being so cold had made it worse and aggravated my daughter’s asthma.”

“It has taken a lot of the stress away of worrying about the cost of heating.”

“A huge difference mentally and physically, I am able to function and keep my independence and continue giving back to the community with my volunteer services.”

“Everyone was so helpful, with having a terminal illness, it (help with heating) has made my life a lot better.”

“My wife is paraplegic and it was very difficult with no hot water or heating. After help we were very grateful as my wife bathes every day as I do.”

“It was a big relief, I was at rock bottom, my health went downhill and I was struggling, but now health is improving.”

“I feel my health and welfare were saved from dire consequences by your heaters and help with heating costs.”

Watch the Winter Wellbeing film at www.cep.org.uk/resources/films

Reducing Fuel Poverty
Improving Health &
Progress to Work

Community Energy Plus · 3-4 East Pool · Tolvaddon Energy Park · Camborne · Cornwall · TR14 0HX

01209 614975 / 0800 954 1956 · enquiries@cep.org.uk