



NORTH
LONDON
CARES

Winter Warmth Report 2013/14

CAMDEN

March 2014

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1. Introduction

For the past two years North London Cares has successfully completed ambitious projects in the London Borough of Islington to help older neighbours over the age of 65 to remain warm, active, connected and healthy during the coldest months of the year. This winter, North London Cares was also commissioned by the London Borough of Camden's Public Health Department to replicate the project to support older, potentially isolated neighbours there too.

Building on the experience attained during the previous years' delivery, this project once again sought to reach out to people over 65 during a period of peak vulnerability. To achieve this, we worked in partnership with Camden Council, the NHS Camden Clinical Commission Group, and with other charities and stakeholders, with the aim of identifying residents who were vulnerable to the cold weather and providing them with practical, social and emotional support holistically.

With the project commissioned at relatively short notice at the end of 2013, our teams worked during December, January and February, knocking on over 1,100 doors in the borough and reaching out to hundreds of other people at various community events and locations throughout the winter. Our aim was to provide accessible support to potentially vulnerable older people at a time of year when resources can be stretched – and also to bridge generational and social divides – through a combination of services, activities, provisions and referrals.

This report details that work, setting out the aims, methods, outputs, outcomes, findings and evaluations we have made to make the project even more relevant next time, so that our community network can continue to support as many neighbours as possible in the future.



2. Background

Camden is changing fast. Rapid globalisation, gentrification, migration and the explosion in London's house prices have had a significant effect on the social makeup of the borough. Affluence and deprivation exist side by side; council tenants live next door to expensive private properties and established older residents share buildings with students and young professionals on short-term leases.

This makes for a vibrant and diverse place, but it can also be a challenge for social cohesion, creating new vulnerabilities and in some cases causing individuals to become disconnected. Older residents in particular can often feel lonely, isolated and out of step with their neighbours.

Meanwhile, changes in the climate have led to people feeling anxious about unpredictable weather¹, and particularly about the isolating potential of winters. Last winter (2012/13) brought heavy snow and at least five bitterly cold snaps², and while this winter (2013/14) was less punishing, the period between November and March remains a key point of vulnerability.

The difficulty of going outdoors in winter exacerbates the social issues described above and, with the well-publicised rise in energy prices hitting older residents especially hard, many are at increased risk from the physical and mental health implications of cold weather.

North London Cares' Winter Warmth project sets out to mitigate these problems, identifying those in need of help and supporting individuals to build and sustain social bonds during the harshest period of the year.



¹ See **North London Cares: Community Resilience Report 2013:** <http://northlondoncares.org.uk/blog/community-resilience-project-the-full-report/>

² See **North London Cares: Winter Warmth Report 2012/2013:** <http://northlondoncares.org.uk/blog/winter-warmth-2012-2013-the-full-report/>

3. Aims

Working closely with the London Borough of Camden, which commissioned this project, North London Cares aimed to knock on at least 1,000 doors over the course of the three coldest months – December, January and February. The aim was to reach out to as many Camden neighbours as we could, mobilising young professionals' time to help bridge divides and support and augment the council's core services. The four key aims of this work were to help keep Camden's older residents **warm, active, healthy** and **connected**.

Specifically we set out to:

- Identify and refer to Camden Council those in need of insulation, boiler repair, or advice about cold weather or other benefits.
- Provide fuel grants for those struggling most with the rising cost of energy, or who had become particularly anxious during the winter due to an unforeseen change of circumstance.
- Donate blankets, warm clothes and hot food to those in need.
- Make healthcare and social service referrals and promote free health checks provided by the NHS locally.
- Increase awareness of, and enable people to attend, North London Cares' local social clubs.
- Broker friendships that can provide practical help and social support – in particular through North London Cares' ongoing Love Your Neighbour project, which matches young professionals to older neighbours to help them meet practical and emotional needs.
- Make face-to-face contact with as many residents as possible, to prevent feelings of isolation or abandonment, and to offer peace of mind and a phone number to call in case of challenge.



4. Methodology

With a limited window within which to reach residents – and the unpredictable pressures and demands created by tough winter weather conditions – getting the methodology right was essential. We were therefore grateful for the partnership with Camden Council and various voluntary sector partners in delivering this project.

4.1 Approach

An organised approach was key to the success of the project. There were four components to what we did:

- **Knocking on doors of residents over the age of 65:**
 - Due to the partnership with Camden Council we were able to work from lists of addresses of people over the age of 65 in specifically targeted areas, knocking on doors and distributing leaflets about North London Cares' services along with NHS and local authority literature promoting how people can keep their homes warm and get free health checks.
 - Our delivery team comprised of volunteers and paid staff, working weekdays and weekends.
 - Teams did not begin work until 10:00am, and finished when it began to get dark, so as to not unduly disturb neighbours or intimidate them.
- **Engaging with businesses and voluntary organisations:**
 - We worked in partnership with various community and private organisations to publicise the services and connections made available through the project, including local pubs, betting shops and supermarkets – and Age UK Camden and several community centres.
- **Speaking to GPs and other healthcare providers:**
 - We spoke to a number of professionals in the healthcare sector to help us promote our activities, including at Queen's Crescent, Gospel Oak, James Wigg and Hunter Street surgeries and at the Matthewman Practice.
- **Presenting at community centres and running our own social clubs.**
 - We spoke to hundreds of older residents at various local community events, to raise awareness of the project and North London Cares' core, year-round services.
 - We hosted a number of additional Social Clubs at various locations across the borough, including in our targeted areas, to help spread the message and keep people connected.

4.2 Challenges

Below is a table setting out the challenges we faced and what we did to mitigate them.

Challenge	Why?	Solution
Reaching the most isolated residents.	Many of the most vulnerable residents were unwilling to open their doors.	We were sure to carry council- and North London Cares-branded IDs, and in the cases where people were unwilling to come to the door we spoke to them over intercoms, and posted leaflets or handwritten notes. However, it should be noted that there were probably a very small number of the most isolated who we were unable to reach.
Obtaining reliable lists of addresses.	With a short window, having extensive and reliable lists of over-65 residents was vital.	Partnership was key in overcoming this, and we worked closely with Camden's Housing department to make sure we had address lists in time for the coldest part of the winter.
Engaging those who did not speak fluent English.	Camden has large Italian, Spanish, Bangladeshi and Chinese over-65 populations, many of whom do not speak English.	In some instances – Spanish residents, for example – we had the language skills within North London Cares' pool of staff to cross the communication barrier. With others, younger relatives were often available to act as interpreters. Where the language barrier could not be crossed we made a note of the address in preparation for a second visit. We also worked with community partners to help us disseminate the message to those residents, including the Bengali Workers' Association on Regent's Park Estate.

We also had notable difficulty in engaging with businesses. While employees were positive about the scope of the project, and nominally hoped to support the campaign, decisions about promotion were often deferred to absent managers, with leaflets left undistributed upon our return. This could be because businesses are too focused on the bottom line, or because interactions with businesses were singular and normally very short. We believe that over a longer time period many local businesses – pubs, betting shops, chemists, etc – will help us to identify additional isolation, but that this is too drastic a culture shift to expect in a relatively short timescale.

4.3 Timeline

Below is a timeline of how we divided up the workstreams for the project.

	Nov '13	Dec '13	Jan '14	Feb '14	Mar '14
Knocking doors					
Engaging with businesses					
Speaking to GPs					
Community events					
Final report					

5. Delivery Summary

Delivery:

- North London Cares' Winter Warmth project **reached out to 1,431 residents** in the borough of Camden between December 2013 and February 2014, including by **knocking on 1,115 doors**.
- Overall we managed to make some form of contact – either written (by delivering North London Cares, NHS and Camden Council leaflets), or verbal (on doorsteps or at social events) – with 1,249 of these.
- We **spoke a total of 699 people in person (56.0%)** and **left leaflets for another 550 (44%)**.
- **97 (6.8%) of the total number of people we reached out to received a deeper intervention** of some kind – a blanket, coat or jumper delivered, or a referral to the Council, for example.
- Of these, we referred **45 people (3.1%) to Camden Council's Wish Plus service** – primarily people wanting insulation and help with energy efficiency or advice on benefits.
- We delivered **warm clothes, hot food and blankets to 17 people (1.2%)**.
- We involved **154 people (10.8%) in 27 social events**.
- We distributed **£1,150 in North London Cares fuel grants to eight neighbours** who were struggling with energy bills or food costs, and were experiencing anxiety connected to the winter weather and/or dramatically changed circumstances.
- Of particular note, we intervened in the case of Bacton House in Gospel Oak, supporting residents who were struggling with the refurbishments there with hot meals, and by moving furniture.
- We worked closely with several healthcare partners, including Bluebird Care and James Wigg, Queen's Crescent, Matthewman, Gospel Oak and Hunter Street surgeries to distribute North London Cares, Camden Council and NHS literature, promoting community-wide services and encouraging practices to make referrals where appropriate.
- We worked with several community centres including Abbey Community Centre, Charlie Ratchford Resource Centre, Kentish Town Community Centre and Ingestre Good Neighbours, informing staff about the project, encouraging people to make referrals, and speaking directly to neighbours about the ways in which North London Cares could help.

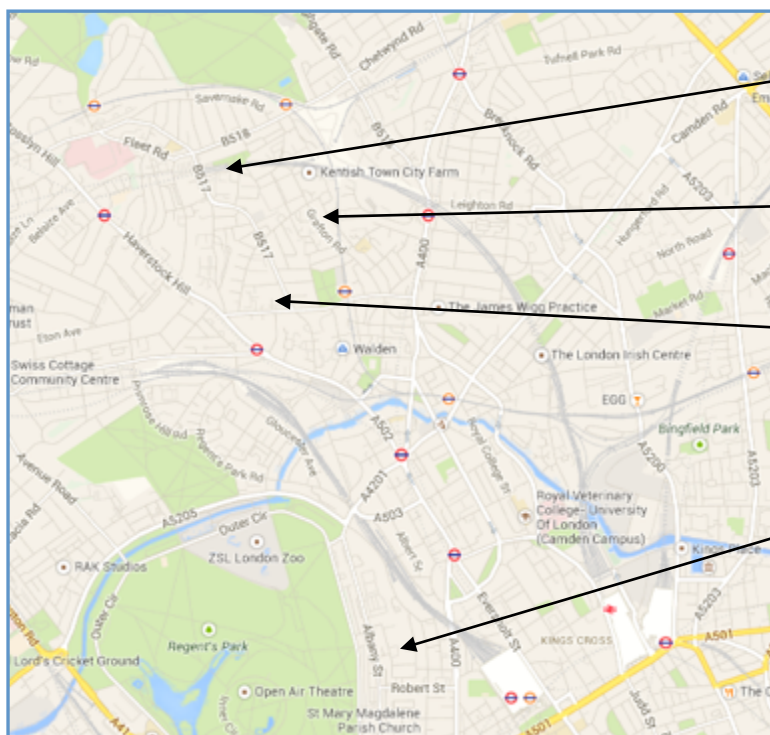
Findings:

- Most of the older residents we spoke to were aware of the cold as a potential health and isolation factor, and most flats felt warm. However there were some examples – residents at Bacton House being a case in point – of individuals potentially falling through the net.
- Energy costs were a big issue, and despite a ‘grin and bear it’ ethos, a large number of people were choosing not to heat their homes so as to save money.
- Older people were in most cases supported by their immediate family or by external service providers. However, a significant minority seemed deeply isolated.
- The existence of young people providing face-to-face social contact generally played a positive role – on those who were vulnerable and those who were not – both on the doorstep and at community events.
- We had a mixed response from local businesses. While retail employees were almost universally positive about the project, after a few days they generally reneged on promises to display our leaflets. There were however notable exceptions – mostly from health-oriented businesses, such as pharmacies.

6. Delivery Breakdown

6.1 Knocking on doors

Overall we attempted to speak to 1,297 residents through door knocking targeted to the lists provided to us by Camden Council for the Regents Park, Gospel Oak, Kentish Town and Haverstock areas of the borough in which older people are concentrated.



Queen's Crescent



Gospel Oak



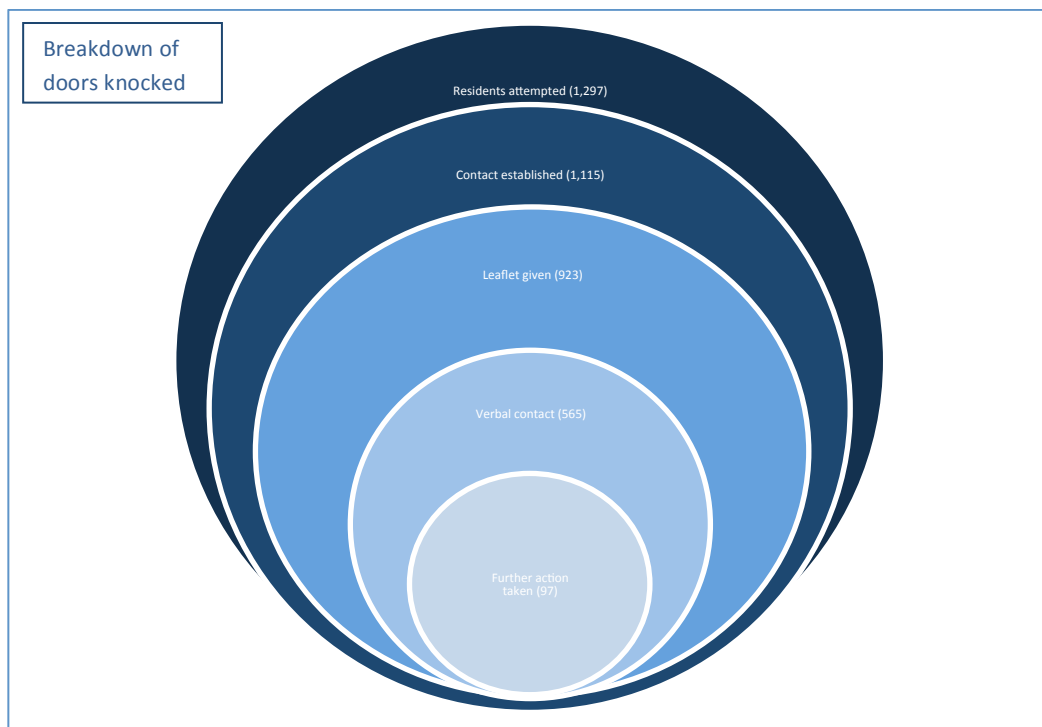
Regent's Park Estate



Haverstock

Of the **1,297 addresses attempted**, 182 were inaccessible (14%), due to security doors or other logistical barriers. In total, therefore, we established contact with 1,115 older residents in Camden through door knocking – either through a conversation in person or by leaving leaflets through the door.

We distributed 923 sets of three leaflets door-to-door. Those leaflets gave information on North London Cares’ specialist winter services, along with information from the NHS on staying safe in cold weather and Camden Council’s information about free health checks. We received a number of calls as a direct result of distributing these resources.



We established verbal contact with 565 people through door knocking alone. The majority of these were also given leaflets, although a few refused to accept them, either because they believed they did not need help, or because they were suspicious of our motives. Having said this, the number of people actively refusing a leaflet (slamming the door etc) was very low – just 15. Overall hostility was rare, and residents in the overwhelming majority of cases welcomed our presence even if they did not feel they required our help.

Most foreign speakers had younger relatives who were able to translate. However, the language barrier prevented us speaking to around 20 people, all of whose addresses we noted down. These people tended to be Italian, Bangladeshi, Spanish or Latin American, or Chinese. We are now seeking groups through which we can reach these individuals, although we anticipate that a few will remain hard to reach.

A significant minority (6.8%) of the total number of people spoken to required a deeper intervention of some kind – either practical or social. With these individuals we took

telephone numbers – or the telephone numbers of relatives – and made follow-up calls within three days. Some made direct contact with us of their own volition, having received the leaflet. This means that overall we **provided a deeper intervention in the cases of 8.7% of the people whose doors we knocked, and 15.2% of those we verbally spoke to through our door knocking efforts alone.** This shows that door knocking is a more effective way of identifying deep isolation than speaking at community events, and suggests there is a strong desire among some over 65s in Camden for additional support during cold weather.

6.2 Providing help

Of the 97 further interventions we made, 45 were referred specifically to Camden Council’s Wish Plus service. We arranged further social events or social contact for another 20 people, and delivered blankets, warm clothes or hot food to another 17.

In addition to this we provided £1,150 worth of fuel grants to eight residents who were the most vulnerable – people who were anxious about meeting spiralling energy bills or other challenges connected to isolating weather or changing circumstances.

Further to this we spoke to 15 residents who were struggling on various fronts, talking through the options available to them through North London Cares’ wider core service provision. For example, we put one woman in touch with an energy ombudsman, so that she could address a problem she was dealing with directly.

It was a wet winter, and on two of the days when rain was heaviest we also, in partnership with private care provider Bluebird Care, distributed 12 ‘goody bags’ containing tea bags, gloves, biscuits and games. An additional 45 of these goody bags were also distributed through our various social club events.

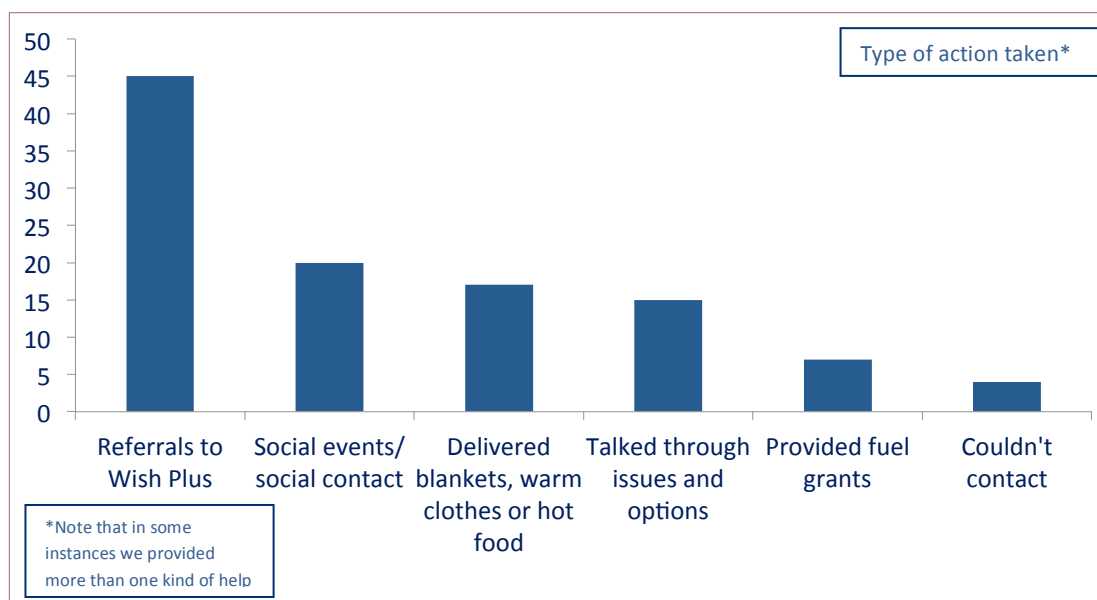
Case Study 1: Anne O’Donnell

We first contacted Anne in mid-February as part of our door-knocking efforts. It quickly became clear that her needs were significant and urgent. Anne lives in Bacton House – which was undergoing a major renovation project – and her home of 30 years had been transformed into a building site.

She is in her late 80s and suffers from many health problems; the disruption and noise of the works were making her anxious and stressed, and the prolonged refurbishment of her kitchen meant she couldn’t prepare hot meals.

We provided Anne with hot meals over two periods of several days, and gave her much needed companionship and support during a tough time.

We have remained in close contact with Anne, and regularly check on her to see if she needs any further help. Anne is grateful for North London Cares’ support, and said, “It’s great to know that there are people out there looking out for people like me.”



The majority of referrals to the Council’s Wish Plus service fell into two categories: assistance with insulation and energy efficiency, and help ensuring the right cold weather and other benefits were being received. Many required both of these interventions, and there were a small number with other problems, such as broken radiators or non heat-related issues.

On the social side, attending events tended to be the most common action taken; a few also signed up to North London Cares’ Love Your Neighbour project, gaining help from volunteers with shopping, for instance.

6.3 Speaking to businesses

In total we spoke to 36 businesses, focussing on the areas surrounding our key door-knocking locations. We directed our efforts towards businesses likely to be frequented by older isolated customers – supermarkets, betting shops, laundrettes, charity shops, pharmacies and pubs.

While employees were generally supportive of the project, and in the overwhelming majority of cases agreed to display leaflets (and, in several cases actively promote our services to their older customers), we often found that they reneged on such offers within a few days. This was possibly due to poor communication between different members of staff, and managers exercising their control over the layouts of shops. In the larger chain supermarkets in particular, assistant managers were likely to break official policy and display our leaflets, but these would generally disappear after a few days.

Still, there were exceptions and pharmacies, charity shops and libraries across the borough continue to display our leaflets about how to sustain connections in the community.

6.4 Working with healthcare professionals

Our teams also met with staff from five health centres across Camden, focussing on the areas surrounding our key door-knocking locations. On some occasions we met with the practice manager, whereas in others – such as at the large James Wigg Group Practice – we presented to all of the GPs at the weekly meeting.

Responses were very positive, and all the health centres we spoke to agreed to display North London Cares, Camden Council Public Health and NHS health check leaflets, and to promote North London Cares' activities to their patients.

Three health centres requested referral forms, to be uploaded to their intranet resource list, so that they can refer patients to us quickly and efficiently, which we provided.

6.5 Community centres and events

We worked with seven community centres across Camden – Abbey Community Centre, Kentish Town Community Centre, Charlie Ratchford Resource Centre, Ingestre Community Centre, Great Croft Resource Centre, Queen's Crescent Community Centre and the London Irish Centre. In addition we spoke over the telephone with the Henderson Court Resource Centre. In most cases we were able to speak with both the staff and the service users. All of the staff we spoke to agreed to promote the various elements of the Winter Warmth project by displaying our leaflets and actively talking to members about the help available.

We had a particularly successful visit to the Charlie Ratchford Resource Centre, where as well as assurances from staff, we returned the following week to deliver four blankets, two sets of thick socks and two cardigans to the most vulnerable members.

In addition to this, throughout the period North London Cares hosted 27 Social Clubs across Camden – including special winter cooking events, film nights, bread making sessions and more (see photographs), reaching an additional 154 older people.



7. Findings

7.1 Preparedness for cold weather

The winter weather was high in the minds of most people we spoke to, and despite 2013/14 bringing comparatively mild weather, older people still seemed to be ‘feeling the cold’.

Awareness of the specific threats cold weather can pose was high. Having said this, the majority of homes were warm, with heating in a few cases controlled externally by a building caretaker.

The number of people in a genuine state of emergency was very low. Where there were issues – i.e. boilers broken etc – they largely seemed to be in hand with the Council’s housing team.

A minor exception was Bacton House in Gospel Oak, a block of flats which was under refurbishment. Residents of this block remained in situ during the renovations, which had led to many going temporarily without heating or hot water and cooking on gas stoves. This made life difficult, especially for the older residents our teams spoke to.

In response, North London Cares diverted resources, delivering blankets and warm food, and helping some individuals to pack up boxes. The refurbishments are being done floor by floor, so this is likely to be an ongoing issue. The Council is now aware of this anxiety and is providing ongoing support to those in the block who need it.

Energy costs were very much on the minds of many of the people our teams spoke to. Many of those who were struggling with the cold were doing so not because the facilities weren’t there for them to heat their homes, but because they were too expensive to fuel. Most said that ultimately they were coping with energy costs, but that they did so at the expense of other necessities – or that they did without heat and wore warm jumpers instead. There was a general attitude of stoicism, with many commenting to the effect of ‘you just do what you have to do to get by’.

A number of estates seemed to be moving towards ‘pay-as-you-go’ energy systems, which was contentious; some welcomed the shift but others believed it would give them additional hassle.

Case Study 2: *Stella Jones and Nora Wood*

We met Stella and Nora during our Winter Warmth presentation at the Charlie Ratchford Centre.

While they were initially a little shy, as we spoke to them it became apparent that they’d really benefit from a little extra help keeping warm.

They asked if we could provide them with some warm clothes, which we did – returning a few days later with blankets, thick socks and cardigans for each of them.

Although these were only small interactions, for Stella and Nora they made a big difference.

Both live alone, and rely on connections in the community to combat isolation.

Each told us they felt reassured to know that there was a community service looking out for older people, and each said they would hold on to our telephone number in case they need it in future.

7.2 Resilience and social cohesion

The vast majority of the people we spoke to were very friendly, and while in most cases they did not have an immediate need themselves, they were overwhelmingly supportive of the project. Many were suspicious when told North London Cares was a charity, but immediately opened up when they realised they were not being asked for money. When told the name of the charity one woman replied, 'Well, it's nice to know *someone* cares'.

Many of the people we spoke to live with relatives, or had a relative close by. Others – especially those who were older or particularly frail – seemed to have regular visits from a carer provided through the Council. Most of the very vulnerable individuals we came across (including some with possibly serious mental health issues) seemed to be on the radar of social services when we investigated further.

In addition to the 97 individuals who received follow-up interventions through this project, our staff and volunteers identified approximately 30 people who they believed were isolated in some way, but who resisted help or were unwilling to give a phone number.

Generally the type of housing block people lived in seemed to have a significant bearing on how isolated people felt. Open plan buildings with caretakers who were known to all the residents tended to have much higher levels of social capital. A couple of the most striking instances of isolation came in flats in Council-owned town houses in generally more affluent areas of the Haverstock area towards Belsize Park. This factor should be borne in mind for future projects.



Case Study 3: *Veronica Francois*

Our team met Veronica during a door knocking session. She was suffering from severe health concerns: her mobility was poor and she was spending most of her time in a cold house. Her closest relatives live thousands of miles away in Australia.

We returned to see Veronica twice, providing her with a blanket, a goody bag, some warm socks and a cheque for £150 to help keep her home warm while she recovers. We remain in close contact and continue to assess her needs.

8. Conclusion

As in previous years of delivering this work across the border in Islington, the Winter Warmth project has proven to be an important way to reach out to some of our most vulnerable neighbours during a very tough and isolating period. Although this winter was not as bitterly isolating as last year, the short days, wet weekends and colder weather can entrench loneliness for many older people, and lead to poor health and social connection. This project makes it easier for our older neighbours to achieve practical tasks, to get out of the house, and to remain warm, connected and healthy.

From our response on doorsteps and in community centres, we know that the older neighbours our teams spoke to value the extra interaction they receive as a result of the project. For the majority of the 1,431 neighbours we reached out to, those conversations, literature and phone numbers brought extra peace of mind. For a significant minority, the interactions were a lifeline.

Beyond those figures of people directly supported, there are also significant 'soft' outcomes from this work. As a result of our outreach, many older neighbours now know that practical help and "social" social services are close by – increasing confidence and connection and restoring a sense that the community cares.

As the population ages and other local authority services are reduced it is vital that this holistic offer – of practical, social and emotional outreach and connection during one of the toughest, most isolating periods of the year – is continued. Indeed, this project has only scratched the surface of isolation in Camden. Fuller coverage, including to other areas of the borough would require a much wider reaching effort with more planning time. In particular, we feel future projects could do more to identify isolation amongst older people in private housing, who may be income poor or deeply socially isolated.

As demographics in Camden change over the coming decade, and healthcare services are integrated further into the community through Clinical Commissioning Groups, we believe that targeted outreach and isolation identification projects such as these will become ever more important.

Winter Warmth in numbers

- **1,431** older neighbours reached out to in total
- **1,115** older neighbours reached directly by door knocking or leafleting
- **699** face-to-face conversations held with older neighbours
- **154** older neighbours involved in social events and befriending schemes
- **£1,150** worth of fuel grants given to the most vulnerable and isolated neighbours
- **97** deeper interactions, including **45** Wish Plus referrals and **17** deliveries of blankets, clothes and warm meals

Report by: Alex Smith, Chris Clarke, Will Rees.