



NORTH  
LONDON  
**CARES**

## **Winter Warmth Report 2013/14**

**ISLINGTON**

March 2014

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## 1. Introduction

For the past two years North London Cares has successfully completed ambitious projects, in partnership with the London Borough of Islington Seasonal Health and Affordable Wellness team, to help neighbours over the age of 65 remain warm, active, connected and healthy during the most isolating months of the year. This winter, North London Cares was again commissioned by Islington Council (this time by the Public Health department) to repeat the project, supporting older residents through the cold winter months.

Building on the experience attained during the previous years' delivery, this project once again sought to reach out to a maximum number of older people in a meaningful way and during a period of peak vulnerability. To achieve this, we worked in partnership with a number of other voluntary and community sector groups to identify neighbours who were vulnerable to the cold weather and to provide them with practical, social and emotional support holistically.

To achieve this our teams worked during December, January and February, knocking on over 1,200 doors in the borough and reaching out to hundreds of additional people at various community events and locations throughout the winter, including many of our own social clubs. Our aim was to provide accessible interactions and interventions to potentially vulnerable older people – 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 in order 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

Islington 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 an already transient, mixed borough. In modern Islington 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 causing many 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 weather<sup>1</sup>, and particularly about the isolating potential of winters. Last winter (2012/13) brought heavy snow and at least five bitterly cold snaps<sup>2</sup>, and while this winter (2013/14) was less punishing, the period between November and March remains a key point of vulnerability.

For older people, 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, pro-actively identifying those in need of help and supporting individuals to sustain social bonds during the harshest period of the year.



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

<sup>2</sup> 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 partners in the Seasonal Health, Housing, Adult Social Cares and Benefits teams at Islington Council, North London Cares aimed to knock on at least 1,000 doors over the course of the three coldest months – December, January and February. Our objective was to reach out to as many Islington neighbours as we could, mobilising young professionals' time to help bridge divides and support and augment the council's core services – in particular keeping our older neighbours **warm, active, healthy** and **connected**.

#### Specifically we set out to:

- Identify and refer to Islington Council's Seasonal Health Intervention Network (SHINE) team 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 those 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 events.
- Build relationships that can provide practical help and social support – including through North London Cares' ongoing Love Your Neighbour project, matching 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 out to neighbours – and the unpredictable pressures and demands created by tough winter weather conditions – getting the methodology right was essential. We were therefore grateful for the collaboration with Islington 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 key components to what we did:

- **Knocking on doors of residents over the age of 65:**
  - Due to the partnership with Islington Council we were able to work from lists of addresses of residents over the age of 65, targeting areas with high concentrations of deprivation. We knocked on doors and distributed leaflets about North London Cares' services along with NHS and Islington Council Public Health literature on how people can keep their homes warm and get free health checks.
  - Our delivery team comprised 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 organisations to publicise the services and connections made available through the project, including Age UK Islington, Islington Giving, Islington Pensioners Forum, The Peel Institute, St Luke's Community Centre, Platform, Durham Road Community Centre, Claremont Project, Holloway Neighbourhood Group, Hanley Road Sheltered Housing, St John's Community Centre, Kevin Richards Foundation, The Business Design Centre, Arsenal FC, and Finsbury Park Community Hub.
- **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 Goodinge Group Practice, Archway Practice and St John's Way Medical Centre.
- **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 community centres across the borough, including in our targeted areas, to help spread the message.

## 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 whom 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 Islington's SHINE team, who quickly sourced us high quality and reliable data.
Engaging those who did not speak fluent English.	Islington 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.

For the first time, this year we also had the additional challenge of mobilising small businesses in the borough – particularly those likely to come into contact with isolation, such as pubs, betting shops, chemists and paper shops. As is evidenced later in this report, this proved difficult. While employees were generally 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 not distributed or visible upon our return.

This could be because businesses are 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 up to identify additional isolation but that it is a drastic culture shift to expect in a few months.

## 4.3 Timeline

Below is a timeline of how we divided up the work streams 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 up to 2,113 residents** in the borough of Islington between December 2013 and February 2014. We **knocked on 1,215 doors** and connected with **832 people at 34 social events** (NB: it is likely that many people attended more than one social club and also received a visit during our door knocking campaign and there is therefore some duplication here).
- Overall we managed to make some form of contact – either written (by delivering North London Cares, NHS and Islington Council leaflets) or verbal (either on the doorstep or at social events) – with 2,047 older residents, **speaking in person to a total of 1,493 people (70.7%)**.
- **95 (4.5%) 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.
- We referred **61 people (2.9%) to Islington Council's SHINE and benefits teams**.
- We delivered **warm clothes and blankets to 23 people (1.1%)**.
- We distributed **£1,350 in North London Cares fuel grants to nine neighbours** who were struggling with energy bills or food costs, and were experiencing anxiety connected to the winter weather and/or dramatically changed circumstances.
- We delivered **18 winter hampers** with various non-perishable food items, donated via our partnership with St Aloysius School in Archway, to older neighbours.
- Volunteers delivered and decorated **4 Christmas Trees to 4 people living alone** in December, and also decorated another neighbour's home.
- We worked with healthcare partners – including Goodinge Group Practice and Archway Practice – to distribute North London Cares, Islington Council and NHS literature, promoting community-wide services.
- We worked with several community centres to brief 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 isolating factor, and most flats felt warm. However there were some examples 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 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.

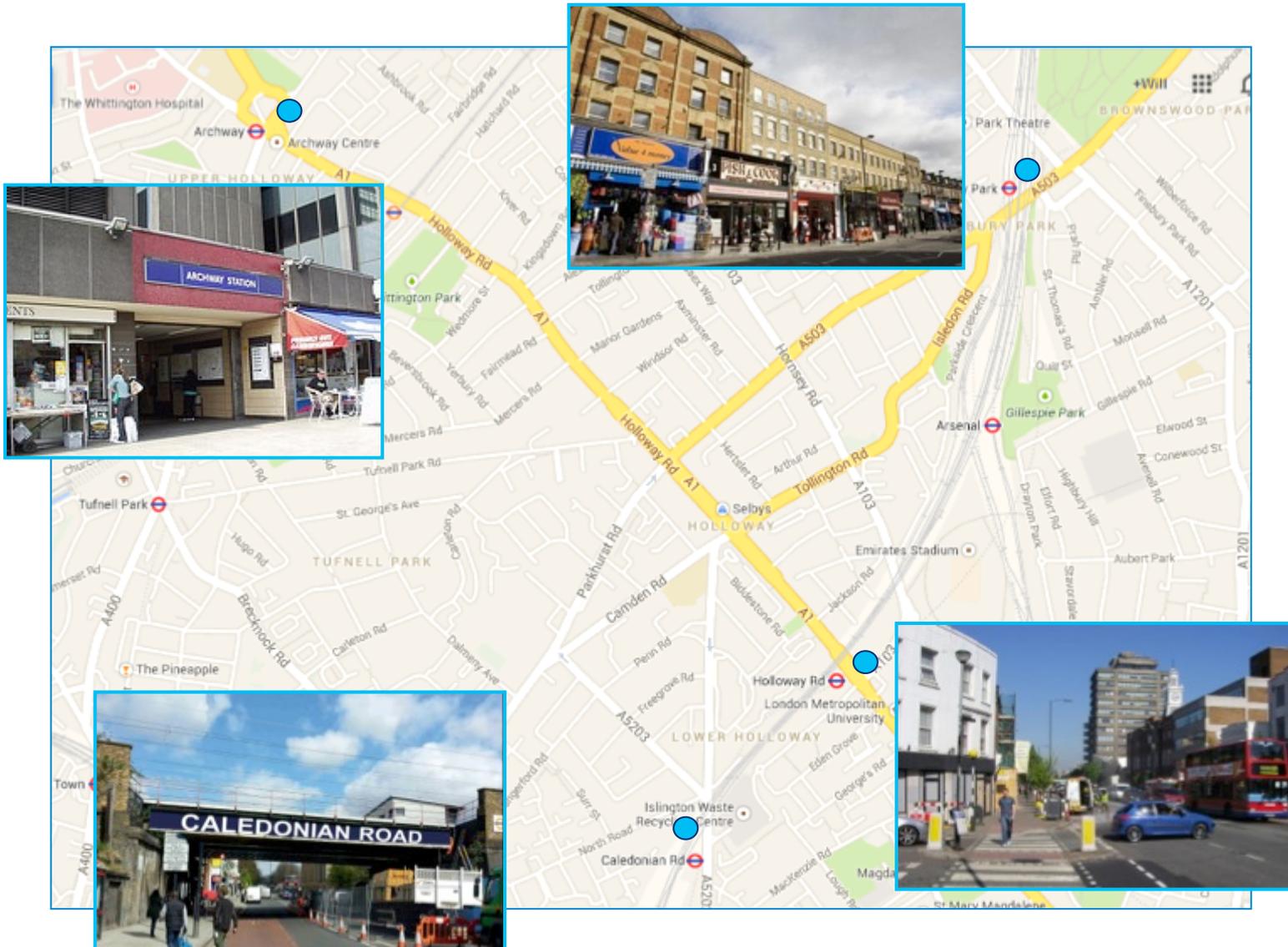


## 6. Delivery Breakdown

### 6.1 Knocking on doors

Overall we attempted to speak to 1,281 neighbours across Islington through door knocking, targeted to the address lists provided to us by the Council.

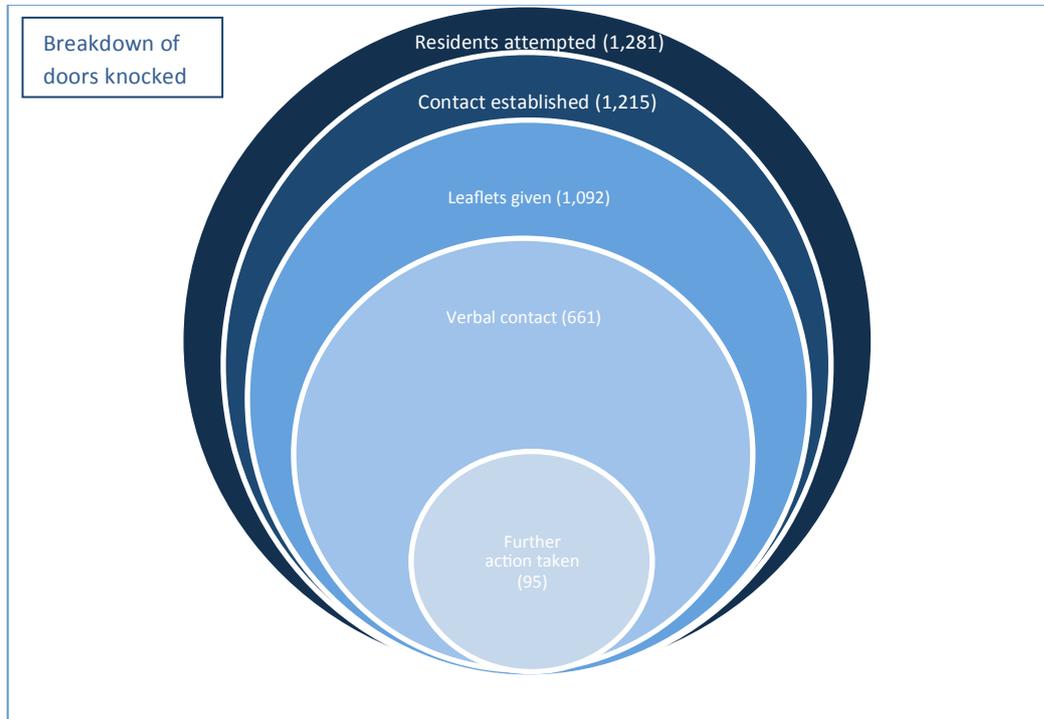
A map of the general areas we targeted door knocking – Archway, Holloway, Caledonian Road, Finsbury Park:



## 6.2 Making contact

Of the **1,281 addresses attempted**, 66 were inaccessible (5.2%), due to security doors or other logistical barriers. In total we established some form of contact with **1,215 older residents** in Islington through door knocking.

We distributed **1,092 leaflets door-to-door** – detailing the elements of the project delivered by North London Cares, along with Islington Council literature on staying safe in cold weather and information about free health checks – and received a number of calls as a direct result of distributing these resources.



We established **verbal contact with 661 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. 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 3 people.

A significant minority (4.5%) 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 **14.4% of those we verbally spoke to through our door knocking efforts**. This shows that door knocking is a more effective way of identifying need than speaking at community events, and suggests there is a strong desire among some over 65s in Islington for additional support during cold weather.

### 6.3 Providing help

Of the **95 further interventions** we made, 61 were referred specifically to Islington Council's SHINE and benefits advice services. We arranged further social events or social contact, or delivered blankets and warm clothes, to another 23 neighbours.

In addition to this we **provided £1,350** in fuel grants to nine residents we identified as being the very most vulnerable, who were anxious about meeting spiralling energy bills or other challenges connected to isolating weather or changing circumstances.

Further to this we spoke to 13 residents who were struggling on various fronts, talking through the options available to them through North London Cares' wider core service provision. Three people had deeper intervention still – such as Prem on the Andover Estate, who received sustained support and advice through a traumatic change in her benefits eligibility.

Christmas can be an especially lonely time for older people, particularly for those who don't have family nearby. Working alongside the Peel Centre and St Aloysius College, volunteers distributed **18 hampers** to older neighbours, and delivered **4 Christmas trees** to people, stopping for a cup of tea on route and returning a few weeks later to remove the tree and decorations.



#### Case Study 1: Alex Morgan

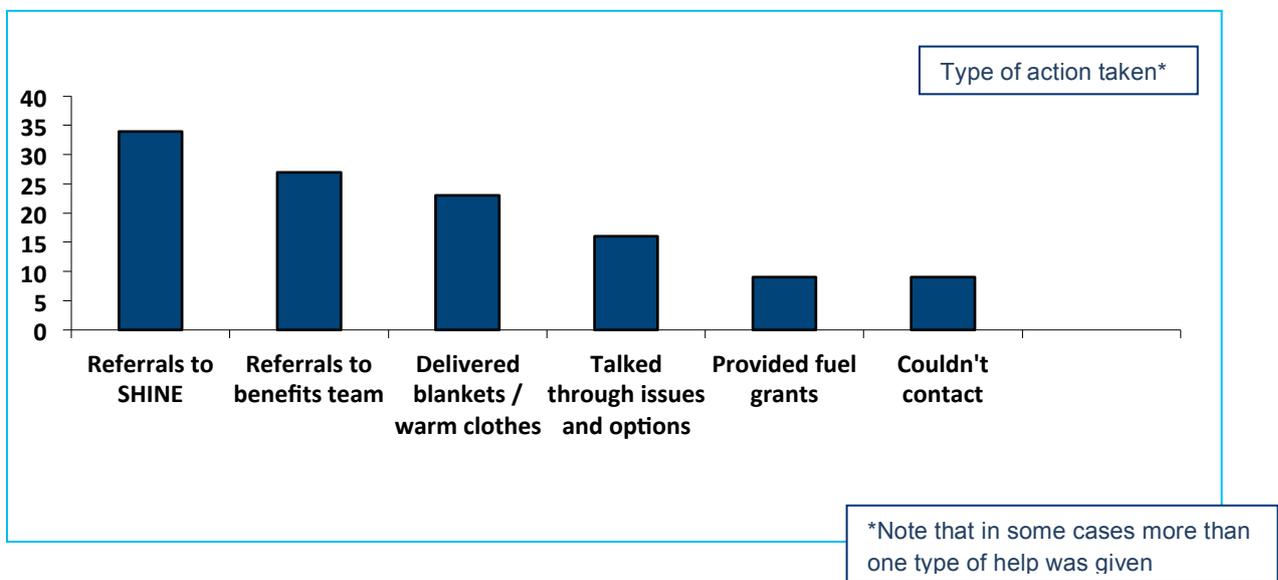
We identified Alex as vulnerable after we met him at our presentation to the Holloway Neighbourhood Group's New Year party at the Old Fire Station on Mayton Street in January 2014.

Alex is disabled and so remains largely immobile, staying mostly within his home, especially during the winter. Keeping warm can be a real struggle.

A few days after meeting Alex, our team visited him to give him a blanket. We left him our contact details and told him to get in touch if we could help any further.

A few weeks later we had a call from Alex asking if we could deliver him a cold alarm – which we did, along with a carbon monoxide alarm too.

Alex is now keen to come along to future North London Cares social events if we can find a volunteer to support him to get there – and we remain in close contact to this end.



The majority of referrals to the Council’s services 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 – although a number also signed up to North London Cares’ Love Your Neighbour project which offers a little help and/or companionship to those who are alone.

## 6.4 Speaking to businesses

We spoke to 14 businesses, libraries, churches and museums – focussing on the areas surrounding our key door-knocking locations in Archway, Holloway, Finsbury Park and Caledonian Road.

We found that libraries and churches were eager to engage with the project, and to help out by displaying our leaflets. They had a genuine desire to know about how our interventions could help their members, and we had fruitful conversations when we visited these places.

With businesses, while employees were generally very 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 promises 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, as well as other priorities. 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 several businesses – as well as libraries and churches – continue to display our leaflets about how to sustain connections in the community. This is an area of the project we would seek to improve next year.

## 6.5 Working with healthcare professionals

Our teams also met with staff from eight health centres across Islington - Goodinge Group Practice, Archway Practice, St John's Way Medical Centre, Killick Street Health Centre, Clerkenwell Medical Centre, Amwell Group Practice, Andover Medical Centre and Islington Outlook & Rehab Team. We met with practice managers, and delivered presentations to GPs

and other health professionals at weekly meetings. Responses were very positive, and all the health centres we spoke to agreed to display North London Cares, Islington Council Public Health and NHS health check leaflets, and to promote North London Cares' activities to their patients. We also spoke to the navigator provided to the community by the Clinical Commissioning Group, who referred three neighbours to us for support.

### 6.6 Community centres and events

As listed above we visited 14 community centres or other voluntary groups across Islington – the Drovers Centre, the Peel Centre, the Claremont Centre, Hanley Road, St Luke's Community Centre Islington Pensioners Forum, Platform, Durham Road Community Centre, Claremont Project, Holloway Neighbourhood Group, St John's Community Centre, Kevin Richards Foundation, The Business Design Centre, Arsenal FC, and Finsbury Park Community Hub. In each case staff agreed to promote the various elements of the Winter Warmth project by displaying leaflets and actively talking to members about the help available – or we presented directly to members.

In addition, North London Cares hosted **34 Social Clubs** across Islington in December, January and February – including special Christmas events, film nights, cooking sessions and the major winter cabaret hosted by Islington Giving and Age UK at the Business Design Centre, which our volunteers supported and distributed leaflets to all **250 guests**.



## 7. Findings

### 7.1 Preparedness for cold weather

The winter weather was high on 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 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.

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: Arif Hassan

Arif had severe drafts under his doors and around his windows. His house was cold and it was aggravating his health concerns. We took his number, but when we tried to call him we found it didn’t work.

Rather than give up we revisited Arif, and took down his number again – bringing along a blanket to help him keep warm until his windows and doors are fixed. Arif was really happy to see us again, and thanked us for our persistence.



## 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 this 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 by 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 95 individuals who received follow-up interventions through this project, our staff and volunteers identified approximately 50 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 building managers who were known to all the residents tended to have much higher levels of social capital.



### Case Study 3: *Betty Collopy*

When we met Betty – in her 80s and the primary carer for her husband – she was struggling to stay positive. She was also becoming a little anxious about trying to complete an application for carer's allowance. Our volunteers spent several hours guiding and supporting Betty through her application for support from the local authority – and, delivered her a cheque for £150 to help with fuel costs. Her husband told us: *"I could kiss you. Thank you so much. It's a big help."*

## 8. Conclusion

As in previous years of delivering this project in Islington, the Winter Warmth project has proven to be an important way to reach out to some of our most vulnerable neighbours in the borough during a very tough and isolating period. Although this winter was by no means as difficult 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, active, connected and healthy.

From our response on doorsteps and in community centres, we know that the older neighbours our teams talk to value the extra interaction they receive as a result of the project. For the majority of the 2,113 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, we know that this project has only scratched the surface of isolation in Islington. 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 reach out to older people in private housing (as well as social housing), who may nonetheless be income poor or deeply socially isolated.

As demographics in Islington continue to 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

- **2,113** older neighbours reached out to in total
- **1,297** older neighbours reached by door knocking / leafleting
- **1,433** face-to-face conversations held with older neighbours
- **£1,350** worth of fuel grants given to the most vulnerable and isolated neighbours
- **95** deeper interactions, including **61** council referrals and **23** deliveries of blankets and warm clothes
- **855** older neighbours involved in social events and befriending schemes

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