



NORTH
LONDON
CARES

Winter Warmth Report

March 2013

Introduction

In November 2012, North London Cares was commissioned to work with Islington Council on a project to ensure borough residents above the age of 65 stayed warm, connected, healthy and active throughout the winter. This project was funded by the Department for Health's Well Winter scheme, and brought together a coalition of local delivery specialists to achieve the central objectives.

North London Cares' specific purpose within this partnership was to identify need in Islington, and to provide various support services, connections and social activities to potentially isolated older people who required them. We focused in particular on the wards of Finsbury Park, Mildmay and Tollington across the north and east of the borough – wards with high proportion of deprivation and large numbers of neighbours over 65 who may be vulnerable to extremely cold weather and its social, health and wellbeing impacts.

Our work built on previous projects delivered in partnership with Islington Council, and in particular with the Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth team.¹ It also sought to harness North London Cares' growing database of young professional volunteers: to apply their energy and know-how to ensure older local people become better connected to community and statutory support networks, including those provided by the National Health Service; and in turn to bring our cohort of young professional volunteers closer to the reality of the community around them.



¹ See *North London Cares: The Big Chill Report* (April 2012) and *North London Cares: Hot in the City Project Report* (September 2012).

Summary

Over the four months that followed, North London Cares delivered a comprehensive winter programme, integrating a number of innovative ideas which, taken together, have provided a valuable support package for neighbours vulnerable to extreme winter weather. These services included:

- Knocking on 1,400 doors through November, December, January, February and March to check in on more vulnerable neighbours and talk to them about the help they could receive from North London Cares and other partners to better cope with extremely cold weather;
- Delivering 1,400 leaflets via local GP surgeries, community centres, day centres and through people's letterboxes with further information on the extra support people could receive;
- Distributing blankets (some donated by Hilton Hotels, some purchased) to those we encountered who felt particularly cold inside their homes;
- Delivering cold and carbon monoxide alarms to help people feel safe in their homes on the most bitterly cold nights;
- Attending 9 local community centres' Christmas parties to speak to people individually and in groups about how they could stay warm and informing them of our partnership's services;
- Addressing additional groups including Islington Pensioners' Forum, Mildmay Pensioners' Association and Mildmay Bingo Club about the various support services on offer;
- Hosting special social events at well-known locations in our targeted areas, in addition to our regular twice-weekly events across the borough;

- Distributing £4,700 in small grants to people struggling to pay fuel bills and other increased costs during winter, made possible by our additional partnership with the London Community Foundation;
- Supporting Age UK and Partners for Islington in delivering additional social and community events and outreach;
- Delivering Christmas hampers, donated by The Islington Tribune, to a small number of local pensioners who would benefit;
- Promoting our message through regular multi-media updates, including through Flickr, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and email – helping to raise awareness of the importance of looking out for vulnerable neighbours and particularly amongst our network of local young professionals;
- Supporting local older people by referring them to council services, including SHINE, the boiler management scheme, energy advice doctors, housing and social services where appropriate;
- Mobilising our database of 350+ volunteers to support their older neighbours through telephone conversations and our “Love Your Neighbour” local support scheme;
- Featuring on BBC London News in the middle of the first period of heavy snowfall to talk about our additional services for older people in the borough – and encouraging people to look out for older neighbours;



The methods

North London Cares has matured significantly since we last completed this project a year ago and we were therefore able to take a smarter, more creative approach this time round in reaching out to people, both the volunteers we recruited and the older people they supported. Last year, for instance, our volunteers knocked on over 4,000 doors in Islington, but that activity did not uniquely target over-65s. As a result only about 12% of conversations – fewer than 500 – were with our target client group of vulnerable over-65s.

This year, we were determined to develop a more efficient and more dynamic community outreach programme that would connect with a greater number of older people and allow us to provide a stronger package of care and connection.

We therefore began our campaign in November by compiling targeted address lists from Council data. We mobilised ten volunteers to begin knocking on the doors of those we identified as over-65: by Christmas, those volunteers had knocked on 300 doors and spoken to an estimated 150 people. Where there was no answer at the door, volunteers were instructed to leave our campaign leaflet, which included information on how to stay warm, and the extra services North London Cares and the Council could offer during the winter months such as shopping for people or helping them get out to the doctor, as well as a phone number to provide an extra layer of support for those in need. These dropped leaflets proved particularly valuable in identifying some of the most vulnerable people – including those who may be apprehensive about answering the door to strangers.

Also in November, we began coordinating with local community centres and other organisations working with older people to build a comprehensive Christmas schedule. Over the following four weeks we attended 9 Christmas parties at the Drivers Centre, Mildmay Community Centre, Caxton House, Finsbury Town Hall, the Peel Centre, Mary Magdalene School, Claremont Centre, St Luke's Community Centre and the Old Fire Station to speak to

attendees about the importance of staying warm, and the services we could offer during a cold snap. We estimate that we communicated directly with 200 people over the age of 65 in this way – and more indirectly or by subsequent word of mouth.

Our agility as a small organisation closely in touch with our target client base began to deliver meaningful results after the turn of the year when, in short succession, there were five bitterly cold snaps and five separate periods of snowfall. Because of our lean central operation and low overheads we were able to recruit two freelance consultants to escalate our door-knocking and other community activity at these times of greatest need. These paid consultants augmented our central and volunteer teams, and allowed us to maximise our efforts at the most critical times.

This strategy yielded strong results. In the two months between the first heavy snowfall in mid-January and the last in late March, our volunteers and consultants knocked on over 1,100 doors, speaking to an estimated 650 people directly about the cold weather and the programme we had developed to make sure people could stay warm, healthy, active and connected. The people we spoke to were overwhelmingly from social housing in our three target wards. However, due to a simultaneous project we were operating in two other wards in Islington – Bunhill and Clerkenwell – we were able to identify isolation and support people with needs in the south of Islington too.

Through these efforts we were able to clearly identify a number of people with various practical needs. We referred about a dozen potentially vulnerable people to SHINE – the Council’s boiler safety scheme. About 30 people were referred to the Council’s Housing team for urgent repairs to improve insulation from the bitter cold. Some were referred directly to social services for further assessments on care provision. And our volunteers were able to directly provide blankets, cold alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, hampers, grants, or volunteer support for everyday tasks to an additional 35 people, normally within 24 hours. In total, our volunteers helped us to directly support over 100 local vulnerable people with specific and meaningful tasks in or around the home.

Meanwhile, our programme of social activities meant we were able to communicate the importance of being extra vigilant against the cold to many hundreds of local older people who were slightly more able and active. We hosted several film clubs additionally to our regular programme at the Mildmay Community Centre and Caxton House, speaking about the special cold weather provisions and handing out literature at each. We also placed our simple literature in GP surgeries and additional local community centres to spread the message further.

1. Group Events

Group events, arranged by various additional local community partners and stakeholders as well as directly by North London Cares, proved a great forum for our central team and our volunteers to speak to a high number of older people about the dangers of extremely cold weather and to converse about the various services available to people to help mitigate against those risks. We chose this avenue because we felt it was important to speak to people on their own terms, and to carry our message out into the places older people already visit and trust. These were informal and often celebratory events and provided excellent opportunities for our volunteers to brief local people over a cup of tea and a mince pie. Our networks in the community, existing programmes of local activity for older people and established trust made us uniquely placed to deliver such outreach.



St Mary's Church, Hilldrop Community Centre and Caxton House Christmas Fetes

North London Cares
@NLCares

The Christmas spirit lives on at the Peel Centre in #Islington - tree, decorations & 'It's a Wonderful Life': pic.twitter.com/fVtbiQam

Reply Delete Favorite More



5:00 AM - 4 Jan 13 Flag media

North London Cares
@NLCares

Ready for the @age_uk #Islington Winter Warmer event and looking forward to meeting our Hilton volunteers! pic.twitter.com/qR6obOMG

Reply Delete Favorite More



1:50 AM - 15 Nov 12 Flag media

North London Cares
@NLCares

Sarah, Amy, Chloe, Richard, Cherie & Brody are all helping at our #Islington #FilmNight this evening. Thanks guys! pic.twitter.com/P3aEcele

Reply Delete Favorite More



1 RETWEET 

10:39 AM - 27 Nov 12 Flag media

North London Cares
@NLCares

We just spoke to loads of happy revellers at the Age UK Christmas Dance at Mary Mag. What a vibrant gig! #brrr pic.twitter.com/fzHqhTEe

Reply Delete Favorite More



9:48 AM - 13 Dec 12 Flag media



North London Cares
@NLCares

Chatting to people at the Drivers about the importance of maintaining social connections during the winter. #brrrr pic.twitter.com/cEjjsqOt

Reply Delete Favorite More



5:48 AM - 21 Dec 12 Flag media

 **Alex Smith**
@alexsmith1982 Follow

Just got on the mic at Mildmay Community Centre bingo night, chatting to 40 older ppl re keeping warm & connected during the cold snap!

Reply Retweeted Favorite More

2 RETWEETS  

11:42 AM - 12 Dec 12

2. Door-Knocking

Our door-knocking activity made up a central part of our contribution to the Winter Warmer partnership. Our intention was to mobilise our volunteers and consultants to identify people who may not normally have access to support or social networks of their own, and to bring those people into the various networks provided by this project and the community and Council at large.

As noted above, throughout the project we knocked on a total of 1,400 doors and spoke directly to an estimated total of 800 people through these methods. These efforts were concentrated on the periods of greatest urgency – namely the 5 separate cold snaps when there was a significant amount of snow on the ground; when people might feel doubly apprehensive about getting out of the house for essentials; or when the short days and icy pavements can be particularly treacherous for people and create even more isolation than normal. These interactions brought forward a large proportion of our casework; North London Cares will continue to support the people we identified during this project as being at risk, and will coordinate with the Council and other local services to do so.



NLC Volunteers Simone, Ben and Amy prepare for winter door-knocking



North London Cares
@NLCares

Andy & Alex have spoken to dozens of older people today, helping ensure they stay warm, healthy & well-connected this Christmas. #brrr

Reply Delete Favorite More

1 RETWEET 1 FAVORITE

8:23 AM - 20 Dec 12



North London Cares
@NLCares

Our volunteers have knocked on nearly 800 doors so far, checking in on our older neighbours and helping them stay warm. #Brrr

Reply Delete Favorite More

2 RETWEETS

11:17 AM - 30 Jan 13



North London Cares
@NLCares

New flyers with details of extra support for older people in the oncoming cold snap are looking great: #brrr
pic.twitter.com/2MxFbioX

Reply Delete Favorite More



1 RETWEET

3:25 AM - 8 Jan 13

Flag media



North London Cares
@NLCares

Snow on the ground and bitter temperatures mean we're talking to older people in #Islington today, making sure they stay warm & connected.

Reply Delete Favorite More

2:52 AM - 14 Jan 13



North London Cares
@NLCares

It's still bitterly cold. Andy is out making sure our older neighbours in #Islington are OK. Please check in on yours too. #SurvivingWinter

Reply Delete Favorite More

4 RETWEETS

3:48 AM - 13 Mar 13

3. Leafleting

In addition to our volunteers' and consultants' conversations on doorsteps and in local community centres, our central team also received a number of calls from people who had learned of our services through leafleting, including at local community centres and GP surgeries. In particular, these leaflets targeted large estates with hub centres, such as the Andover Estate in Finsbury Park and Mayville Estate in Mildmay ward, as well as Caxton House at the top of Tollington ward and the Claremont Centre – one of Islington's best-used resources for older people.



4. Multimedia

North London Cares is a leader in the use of digital technology to engage people to participate in their communities. At the heart of this as any other project, therefore, we were keen to deploy various online tools and platforms to help reach as many older people as possible, as well as young professional volunteers.



As is evident throughout this report, the use of Twitter to help spread the message that people should look out for older neighbours during cold snaps was an important engagement technique. It helped keep our volunteers motivated, and also helped us raise awareness of the importance of diligence against the cold to our wider online community of nearly 900 followers.

We also posted regular blogs and Facebook updates with new photographs of our work as we progressed. We regularly published pictures of social events we hosted and spoke at, and of areas we were focusing on under blankets of snow.



We also created two YouTube videos – one of our Christmas Carols concert at the Claremont Centre in December, and another of our Mixtape event at the Peel Centre in February.

In addition, on Sunday January 20th, on the heaviest day of snowfall this winter, we worked with BBC London News to produce a feature for two prime time news broadcasts that evening. The piece tracked our volunteers going door-to-door in the thick snow, and featured a brief interview with North London Cares' chief executive on the project.



This broadcast would have been seen by potentially millions of Londoners, and tens of thousands of people in Islington. It helped us to increase interest in the campaign locally and also to recruit new volunteers. Grabbing the video and publishing it on YouTube gave us another chance to spread that message.²



² Please visit www.northlondoncares.org.uk or www.flickr.com/northlondoncares for more multimedia.

Case studies



1. SOOGRIM, 70, TOLLINGTON

North London Cares' volunteer Andy had identified Soogrim as potentially needing help after knocking on his door in January 2013. Soogrim is 70 years old, registered blind and recently lost his wife. Although his daughter lives close by and helps out as much as possible, Soogrim can still become very anxious – and was especially nervous when his boiler broke down twice during two of the coldest snaps of the winter. North London Cares supported Soogrim by helping him set up an urgent appointment with the Council to fix his boiler. Later, a volunteer took him two blankets, which gave him peace of mind should his boiler fail again. Finally, we were able to secure a London Community Foundation grant of £500 for Soogrim to help him meet the rising cost of fuel bills this winter. Soogrim calls us occasionally to thank us for the help our network has provided and to seek further assistance.



2. LIL, 84, HOLLOWAY

Lil is a much-loved member of North London Cares' regular social clubs. She is 84 and has been living alone since losing her husband ten years ago. This winter, Lil suffered two spells in hospital, first with bronchitis and later with flu. She remained in hospital during Christmas and New Year. Our social clubs and Love Your Neighbour scheme have acted as a lifeline for her as she recovered. They have helped her get out of the house during evenings when she becomes lonely, and they have provided her with a trusted network of volunteers who she now calls friends. North London Cares were very happy to deliver her a Christmas hamper, donated by local newspaper the Islington Tribune, to demonstrate that the community cared for her at a difficult time. We also helped Lil secure a small grant from the London Community Foundation.



North London Cares
@NLCares

Just delivered winter hampers to Harry, June & Lil who've each been through tough times recently. Thanks [@IslingtonTrib](#) for donating them.

[Reply](#) [Delete](#) [Favorite](#) [More](#)

3

RETWEETS



2:44 AM - 15 Jan 13

3. NITSA, 66, FINSBURY PARK

Nitsa is 66 and lives on the Andover Estate in Finsbury Park ward. She is very house proud, and her flat is beautifully well kept. However, when a North London Cares volunteer called round to make sure she was warm enough during the first blast of snow this winter, Nitsa was feeling upset. She was concerned about fuel bills and the cost of a new door that had been installed in her flat, apparently against her will. North London Cares spent a week developing a case for her to apply through us for a £450 grant to help her through the winter. When it arrived, Nitsa was delighted – and put the money to good use on heating her home and ensuring the repairs bills were covered.



North London Cares
@NLCares

Nitsa, Andover Estate: "I'm 66 and believe it or not this is the first time someone has offered to help me." #SurvivingWinter

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

5
RETWEETS



6:35 AM - 17 Jan 13

4. DORIS, 72, MILD MAY

Doris had recently had some very sad news that her husband was terminally ill – when our volunteer called round he had recently been taken into a wheelchair. Doris was upset but also had practical concerns. Now that her husband was in a wheelchair, it had become very difficult to get him into their block of flats, as her door fob only accessed the building at one end, and the lift was at the other. We reassured Doris that we would get her a new fob for the door at the lift end of the building – and she had one within four days. Doris was very grateful that such a minor but potentially isolating challenge had been taken out of her hands and solved so quickly, saying “this came at just the right time, thank you for being there.”



North London Cares
@NLCares

Thank you @IslingtonBC for your very swift solution to our query about Doris' wheelchair access. Good partnership, happy neighbour. :-)

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

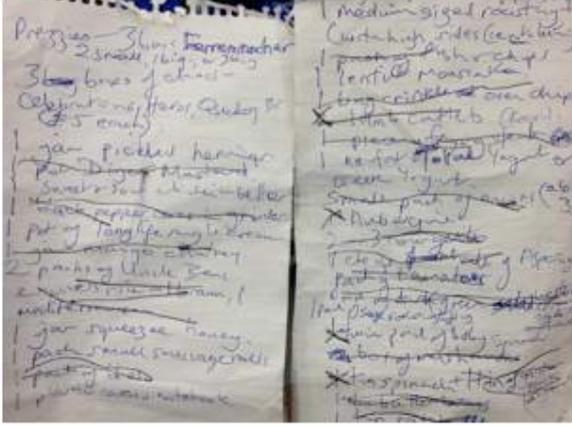
4:31 AM - 3 Jan 13

More case studies

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Longest shopping list ever! One of these is double-sided! Good to know Liz got her essentials in for Xmas though:
pic.twitter.com/10E3gU3H

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More



7:43 AM - 13 Dec 12 Flag media

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Pat: "It's nice to know there are people like you around. Please pass on my regards to Lauren (volunteer). She was so helpful to me".

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 FAVORITE 

8:05 AM - 10 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

We're speaking to Bob in #Islington, trying to help him pay his parking tickets so he doesn't accrue new charges & can get to the hospital.

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

6:47 AM - 8 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Thank you @NilesMike for taking the time to chat with Mitzi on Christmas Day. A little companionship at that time of year can go a long way.

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

2:59 AM - 2 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

It's still bitterly cold out, so off to deliver a blanket to Efa today. Please keep an eye out on your older neighbours in this weather!

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 RETWEET 

6:57 AM - 14 Mar 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Cold & monoxide alarms delivered to Alma in Crouch Hill. It's #brrr out there so please look out for our older neighbours.
#SurvivingWinter

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

6:36 AM - 18 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Today we've spoken to Terrence, Teeva & Michael, helping them with various needs as part of our #SurvivingWinter campaign.
#Brrr

← Reply 🗑 Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 RETWEET 

8:51 AM - 24 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Great to give Jill & Inez cold & carbon monoxide warning alarms. Peace of mind, as well as wrapping up, are important this time of year.

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 RETWEETS 

8:04 AM - 17 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

As a result of our winter project, Mr Capper has had new radiators installed by the Council & Mr Ward's windows have been fixed. Community.

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

3 RETWEETS 1 FAVORITE 

2:11 PM - 22 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Just had a letter from @London_CF -- Ronald's grant to help pay for his winter bills has been approved. That will help so much. Thanks!

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 RETWEETS 

2:52 AM - 21 Dec 12

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

We just delivered 2 blankets, donated a local charity shop, to Hady in #Islington as part of our winter warmer project. Toasty.

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

8:20 AM - 31 Dec 12

Reply to @NLCares

 **Islington MPS** @MPSIslington 31 Dec
@NLCares Great, keep up the good work. Happy New Year
Details ← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ⋮ More

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Andreia has been to visit Carlinda again, helping her translate important bills & hospital appointment letters. She's been a great friend.

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

6:32 AM - 20 Mar 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Margaret, 66: "NLC are the only people who've ever knocked on my door to ask if I'm OK. I'd like there to be a lot more stuff like NLC."

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

2 FAVORITES 

9:19 AM - 11 Mar 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Khaled is delighted with his new duvet & pillow set, donated by @HiltonHotels. That'll keep him & his wife proper toasty! #SurvivingWinter

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

1 RETWEETS 

8:31 AM - 24 Jan 13

 **North London Cares**
@NLCares

Angie: "I hope you all have a very happy Christmas. Thank you for what you are doing. You & your volunteers have been a real help."

← Reply 🗑️ Delete ★ Favorite ⋮ More

10:58 AM - 11 Dec 12

Understanding the response

In total, our volunteers and core team held face-to-face conversations with over 1,000 local people over the age of 65 through this campaign, and may have reached another 500 through our various leafleting efforts. Aside from the direct practical benefits described above, which many of our most vulnerable neighbours took up, we found that the most valuable addition resulting from this campaign was community resilience and peace of mind. As was the case last year, a significant proportion of the people we spoke to already felt warm and secure in their homes, and felt they had strong support networks around them in case of emergency. In these cases, this campaign added value to the community and improved wellbeing by reassuring our neighbours, who were almost unfailingly grateful for a knock on the door during an isolating winter, and the extra security of a friendly face and number to call should the need arise.

This added security was normally articulated directly to the volunteer on the doorstep, or to the message carrier at an event. It would often be expressed in simple terms through comments such as “It’s great to know there are still young people out there who care” and “this is a very good idea.” Others simply smiled warmly and thanked our volunteers for their concern.

Perhaps more critically, however, we were also able to identify over 100 people for whom our various interventions made a significant practical difference, whether by delivering blankets or cold and carbon monoxide alarms, aiding with connections to critical Council departments or supporting people with grant money. Those interventions, on top of the knowledge of additional support should the need arise, made many people more confident at an anxious time.

As we stated in our end of project report last year, there is a clear desire in many parts of Islington for increased opportunity for such simple interactions and neighbourliness between residents. Projects such as this can readily fulfil that social impulse, at the same time as helping to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

Conclusions

Through our four projects in partnership with Islington Council over the past 15 months, North London Cares has developed a clear picture of our neighbours' seasonal needs and the many interconnected pastoral concerns. Most critically, many of our neighbours over the age of 65 are have grown especially worried about their ability to cope during wintertime. Fuel bills have become completely unaffordable for many, meaning many people are growing increasingly anxious about debt. There is real fear amongst people over the age of 65 that unaffordable bills will leave people with gas and electricity cut off at the time when it is needed most, and in urgent crisis. Other people are living alone or in housing with old or faulty boilers or poor insulation. Due to deprivation, a high number of these residents also suffer from respiratory or cardiovascular conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to cold weather. Worryingly, some have only the most limited access to the social networks many take for granted, that could help them cope in freezing conditions.

Compounding these concerns are new fears that the weather has become increasingly volatile and unpredictable. This winter, in particular, has shocked some people into new anxiety. Media reports suggest we have suffered the harshest winter for 50 years. Between January and March 2013 we experienced 5 separate and very severe cold snaps, each bringing new heavy snowfall and extended periods of isolation and anxiety for many older people in Islington – particularly those over the age of 75 and for those who live alone and without social connection. Recent reports now suggest the bitter cold could continue until the very end of April, causing further concern.

In future, if reports of harsher winters³ prove correct, and as apprehensions about the social, financial and health implications of those colder winters increase, projects such as these will become vital. We hope to be able to work on similar innovative campaigns to help keep our neighbours warm next year, and beyond.

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/will-this-be-the-coldestwinter-for-50-years-8463982.html>