



NORTH LONDON **CARES**

**WINTER WELLBEING  
2018/19 EVALUATION REPORT**

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## 1.0 Introduction

In 2018, the government appointed its first Minister for Loneliness in response to a report from the Jo Cox Commission which labelled loneliness an “*evil giant*”. It highlighted the staggering admission from **over 9 million adults in the UK**, that they **are often or always lonely**<sup>1</sup> and that two in five older people say the television is their main form of company<sup>2</sup>. With loneliness causing serious health risks, worse than obesity and as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, action is imperative. Research shows that lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression and the increased risk of premature death is estimated to be between 30% and 45%.

For people over the age of 65, winter is already a life-threatening season. With cold and flu infections on the rise when immune systems are weaker, cold snaps can prove fatal. Loneliness only compounds the threat. For many surviving on state pensions, the choice between high heating bills or surviving freezing temperature in poorly insulated buildings can result in feelings of anxiety and isolation. The fear of falling in icy conditions, leading to extensive hospital stays and greater risk of infection, coupled with feelings of vulnerability travelling alone in the dark, can affect people’s confidence. Socialising can not only feel like a low priority but an added pressure during a stressful time.

For the last eight years North London Cares has recognised the importance of connection, introducing Camden and Islington’s young professionals to their older neighbours through social clubs and one-to-one friendship matching, in an effort to unite the community. Winter Wellbeing is the charity’s seasonal project – now in its eighth year – and is a direct response to the additional mental and physical challenges faced by older people during the most isolating months. The aim is to keep older neighbours **warm, active, healthy and connected**.

### **Our key objectives for the project this year were:**

- To ensure older neighbours stayed warm at home through preventative activities targeting fuel poverty;
- To help keep older people informed about local health, housing and benefits services and other provisions;
- To connect people to North London Cares’ broader social programmes and networks.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/loneliness-research/>

## To fulfil these objectives, North London Cares offered:

- A door-knocking campaign, in partnership with Camden and Islington Councils, targeting older neighbours over the age of 65 in areas of high deprivation and loneliness;
- Warm items such as blankets, hot water bottles, socks, gloves, hats, hand warmers and thermos flasks;
- Small grants of up to £100 for neighbours struggling with bills and food poverty;
- Referrals to fuel poverty services such as WISH+ at Camden Council and SHINE at Islington Council for advice and support on keeping warm at home, for instance through draft-proofing and insulation tips, and by helping people to understand bills and payments;
- Direct signposting to organisations offering advice and support in the areas of health, transport, social services, financial support, housing, practical support, mental health and social connections;
- Invitations to North London Cares' Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes;
- Community outreach for people in sheltered housing units, GP surgeries, flu jab clinics, pharmacies, community centres, libraries, existing community events and local cafes;
- Street outreach focusing on local shops, pubs, bus stops and post offices;
- Re-engagement to older neighbours we had met through previous projects.

## 2.0 Delivery

Our Winter Wellbeing project launched on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 and ran until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. It was managed by our year-round Outreach Coordinator, with additional support from an Outreach Officer and a North London Cares volunteer. Together they proactively searched for older neighbours in need of support, through a combination of door knocking and community engagement.

*“A pre-warning letter helped ease anxiety to open the door” Marie,*  
**91**

## 2.1 Door knocking

In partnership with the joint Camden and Islington Public Health department, we sent letters to 300 council tenants aged 65 or over, in each borough, letting them know we would be knocking on their doors in the coming weeks. Co-signed by the council, letters included an introduction to Winter Wellbeing and North London Cares, with a flyer, and clear opt-out instructions for anyone who didn't want a visit. Areas were targeted where social isolation is more prevalent, according to Age UK's loneliness heat maps and Council data. A further 200 letters were sent to older neighbours in each borough, offering them a home visit or call if they wished.

Outreach was conducted in pairs, with each person carrying an identification badge and a copy of the Winter Wellbeing flyer, which prompted older neighbours to recall the letter they received. On average 30 doors were knocked per day, during daylight hours. When an older neighbour wasn't in or didn't want to open the door, a calling card was left with our details and the offer of a future visit.

Conversations with older neighbours took place on the doorstep, or in many instances, in the home. The North London Cares team, which received the council's *Making Every Contact Count* training, adopted a warm, friendly approach, listening to each person's needs and frustrations and repeating their concerns so they felt heard and understood. Being in people's homes also allowed the team to observe issues and assess need.



*“When the people from Winter Wellbeing came over, they were great. I really warmed to them” Victor, 77*



Neighbours with cold homes were offered warm items and referrals to WISH+ and SHINE, council services which help people to understand bill payments and provide free energy doctor visits to improve insulation. Those suffering anxieties over large heating bills were offered grants of up to £100, in the form of cheques or food vouchers. The team also spoke to people about their health and transport needs, social services requirements, financial support needs, housing issues, local practical support, mental health and signposting to other social connections – in addition to the free social clubs and friendship matching programmes offered by North London Cares.

Winter Wellbeing packs were a new addition to the 2018/19 project. North London Cares branded wallets were given to older neighbours who wanted further information or to those who were uncomfortable discussing their situation in person. Packs included a Winter Wellbeing covering letter inviting people to contact our outreach team for more information or to support people with referrals, North London Cares Social Clubs programmes, leaflets for flu jab reminders, and advice on healthy living and community companions.



## 2.2 Community outreach

This year a concerted effort was made to increase community outreach, based on the limitations experienced during last year's project, which focused primarily on door knocking which can deliver mixed results. In contrast, community outreach often led to valuable conversations with older neighbours who had left their house looking for warmth or subsidised lunches. The approach also allowed local centres, who had built close and trusted relationships with older neighbours, to refer people for support.

In advance of this year's project, deeper relationships with local community partners in Camden and Islington were cultivated, which resulted in trust and enthusiasm for the project from the moment it was launched. Building those partnerships gave us access to coffee mornings, tea parties, health and wellbeing events, drop-ins, flu jab clinics, tenants and residents' association meetings, community lunches, leaseholder days, information sessions and lunch and learn sessions with health professionals and support staff.



We hosted information stalls and 'coffee and chat' pop ups and flyers were displayed in spaces where people over 65 frequent, including GP surgeries, libraries, chemists, supermarkets, gyms, sheltered housing communal spaces, community events and community centres. We also presented to an occupational therapist meeting at University College London Hospital, and at meetings run by Help On Your Doorstep for housing organisations.

To further promote our work **Partners Islington**, who kindly donated money towards Winter Wellbeing for warm items, promoted Winter Wellbeing to their wide network via newsletters, mailouts, and magazines and *GoodGym* carried out a 'group run', flyering 200 doors in St Pancras and Somers Town. This collaborative approach helped us to have a wider reach to council and social housing tenants, as well as private renters.



## Organisations who helped promote the project included:

Partners Islington	WISH+	Camden Community
Good Gym	Camden Council	Connectors
Voluntary Action Islington	Islington Carers Hub	MIND
Voluntary Action Camden	Clarence Way Management	Camden CCG
Highgate Newtown CC	Scotscare	Jean Stokes CC
Help On Your Doorstep	Kingsgate CC	Andover CC
Marchmont CC	Camden Federation of	Manor Gardens
Alzheimer's Association	Private Tenants	Highbury Round House
Holly Lodge CC	Brickworks CC	Victim Support
Islington Bangladeshi	Stephen Ink CC	Rapid Response Unit
Association	Hilldrop CC	St Luke's Church
Whittington Park CC	UCL Hospital	British Red Cross
SHINE	Ageing Better in Camden	Stroke Association
Islington Council		The Irish Centre

## We also worked with the following GPs and pharmacies in Camden and Islington:

James Wigg Practice	Amphill Surgery	Hampstead Group Practice
Regents Park clinic	King's Pharmacy	Junction Medical Practice
Brookfield Park Surgery	The Village Practice	
Somers Town Medical	Regents Park Practice	
Centre	Boots Upper St Pharmacy	

## Sheltered housing units also spread the message, including:

Elsinore House	Sycamore Court	Gospel Oak Court
Highbury View	Nuffield	Springfield Court
Denton	Spring Court	

In response to the success of previous projects, this year Southern Housing piloted a scheme in partnership with both North London Cares and South London Cares, based on our door knocking approach. 30 tenants were sent letters introducing the project and informing them that North London Cares would pay a visit.



We also organised street outreach to meet older people. These resulted in shorter conversations using the cold weather as a prompt to talk about Winter Wellbeing in charity shops, supermarkets, on public transport, and in the street. Interactions led to information being taken or calls coming in following the informal chat.

The North London Cares team also organised a Winter Wellbeing event in November 2018 at Highgate Newtown Community Centre. To promote the four corners of Winter Wellbeing – warmth, activeness, health and connection – four stalls were occupied by representatives from SHINE, Red Cross Connecting Communities, Camden Community Connectors, and Three Discovery. In addition to technology lessons, a North London Cares volunteer led a chair exercise workshop to give people tips for keeping warm at home and a food bank was available to those in need. Older neighbours could help themselves to Winter Wellbeing information packs: 34 were taken away.

The Winter Wellbeing team also collaborated with North London Cares' Love Your Neighbour and Social Clubs programmes to promote this project. Social club programmes, posted and emailed to over 1,000 older neighbours ever month, included leaflets and information on Winter Wellbeing for six months. Our Love Your Neighbour team, who manage our one-to-one friendships, were also proactive in promoting the message to their matches too, calling every older neighbour with a match or those waiting for one, to see if they needed any additional support from Winter Wellbeing. The team also shared information with referral partners.



**NORTH LONDON CARES**  
**WINTER WELLBEING**  
 IF YOU'RE OVER 65, WE CAN HELP YOU STAY WARM, ACTIVE, HEALTHY AND CONNECTED DURING THE WINTER  
 FROM OCTOBER 2018 TO MARCH 2019 WE CAN:

- Deliver hot water bottles, blankets or thermal socks to your door.
- Connect you to organisations who will help keep your home warm and safe, provide benefits advice, and help reduce bills.
- Connect you to brilliant social activities in your area.
- Help you to access health services and advice on where to get a flu jab.
- Arrange small grants for people in difficult circumstances who are struggling to keep their homes warm.
- Add you to the North London Cares activity list so that we can keep in touch throughout the year.

**TO FIND OUT MORE GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR TEAM:**  
 Call 0207 118 3838  
 Email [resources.publish@northlondoncares.org.uk](mailto:resources.publish@northlondoncares.org.uk)  
 or visit [www.northlondoncares.org.uk](http://www.northlondoncares.org.uk)

**Camden ISLINGTON**  
 Throughout the year North London Cares runs free social clubs and one-to-one friendship matches across Camden and Islington.

North London Cares is the public name for NLC Cares Limited, UK registered company, number 07329768 and a UK registered charity, number 1132127.

### 3.0 Project Summary

#### Through Winter Wellbeing 2018/19:



498 doors were knocked on across Camden and Islington in four months



339 older neighbours received support they didn't know they could access



Over 1,000 conversations were shared with older neighbours



33 people in urgent need received a small grant of up to £100 – totalling £2,500



334 blankets, thermal socks and warm items were delivered to older neighbours who were struggling to stay warm



The Winter Wellbeing message was shared at 72 community events

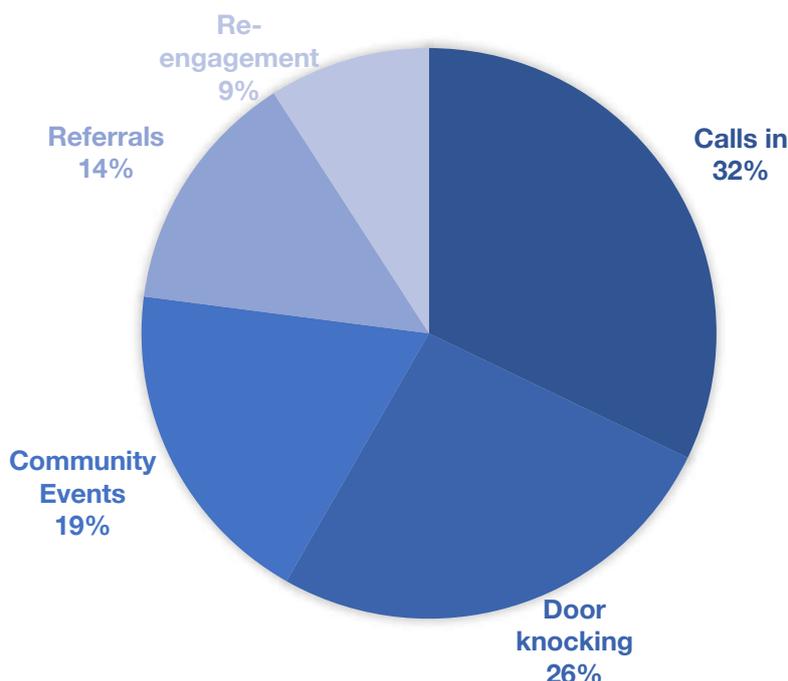


98 people were referred to WISH+ and SHINE for help with housing and benefit worries, social care guidance and energy advice



606 individual interventions were made on behalf of older neighbours who needed help staying warm, active, healthy and connected.

## SOURCE OF INTERVENTIONS



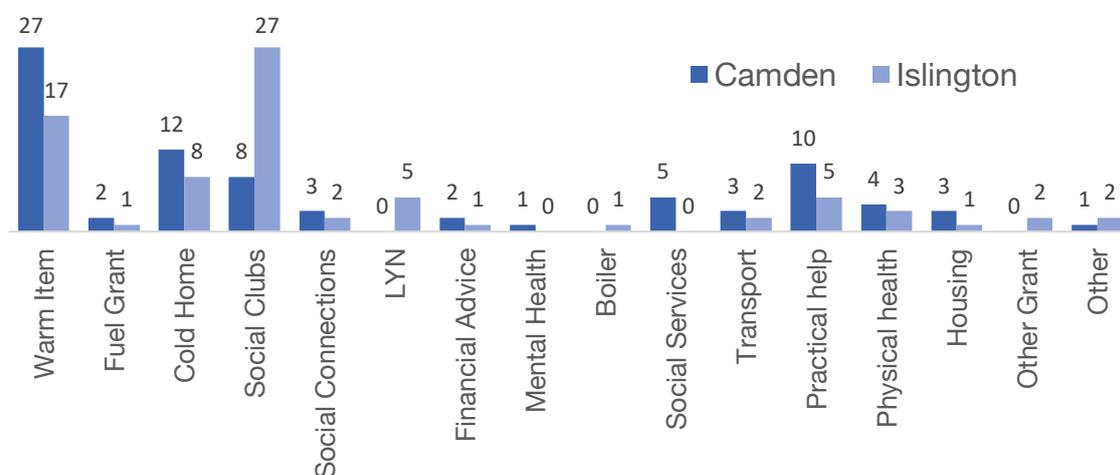
### **3.1 Door knocking**

	<b>Camden</b>	<b>Islington</b>	<b>Total</b>
Doors knocked	226	272	498
Neighbours receiving an interaction	141 (62%)	180 (66%)	321 (64%)
Neighbours receiving an intervention	43 (19%)	53 (19%)	96 (19%)
Total number of interventions	81	77	158

Of the 300 older neighbours we wrote to in Camden, six people opted out of a visit while two people from the additional 200 letters requested a meet. In Islington five people opted out, while four opted in, showing that the vast majority welcomed a visit. Due to security gates we were unable to access 97 properties across both boroughs, but all received the Winter Wellbeing flyer and instructions on how to access support.

Last year door knocking was conducted by one member of North London Cares staff but for safety and morale, this year the outreach team went door knocking in pairs. This meant more capacity was invested in this method, but with fewer doors to knock this proved manageable. The number of neighbours receiving an interaction rose from 24% of overall attempts to 64% and the neighbours receiving interventions also rose – from 8% to 19%. Despite knocking on fewer doors, the total number of interventions secured via door knocking alone increased from 153 in 2017/18 to 158 in 2018/19.

Warm items and social connections (introductions to our Social Clubs and LYN programmes, as well as partner organisations) proved the most popular intervention. Cold home referrals and support with practical and physical help was also an area of interest for older neighbours we visited.



### **3.2 Community events**

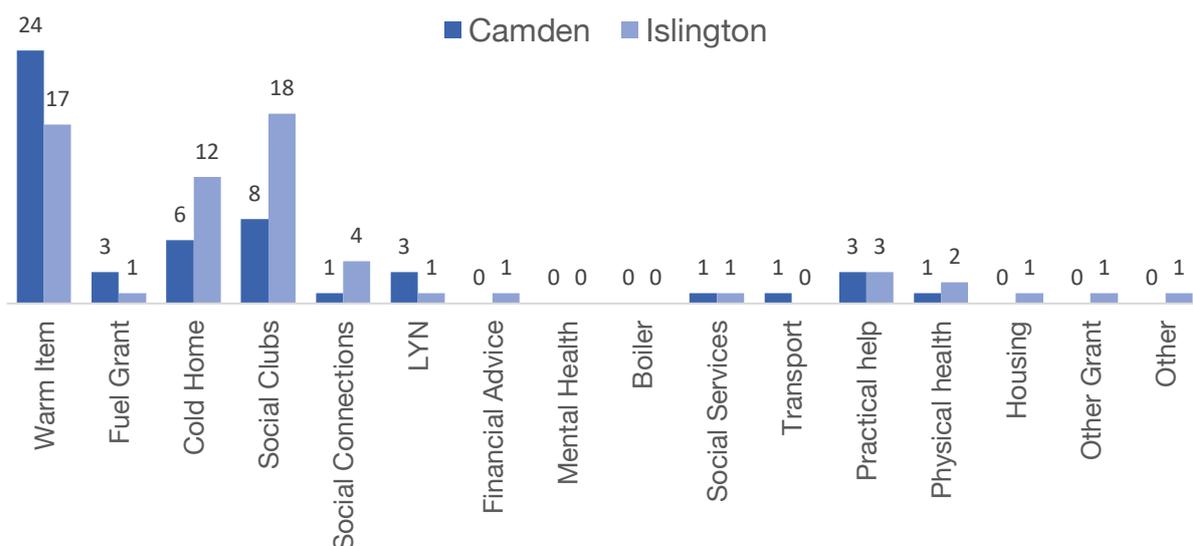
	<b>Camden</b>	<b>Islington</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of community events attended	39	33	72
Neighbours receiving a leaflet	369	386	755
Neighbours receiving an interaction	247	341	588
<b>Neighbours receiving an intervention</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Number of interventions</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>114</b>

In total the Winter Wellbeing team attended 72 community events this year – 40 more than last year.

The breakdown of the interventions are as follows:

- 10 visits to sheltered housing units were made resulting in 24 interventions;
- 17 sessions in GP surgeries led to four interventions;
- 33 community events produced 86 interventions;
- 12 street outreach sessions led to no interventions.

Warm items, cold home referrals and social connections proved the most popular ask through community events. While this method resulted in fewer interventions than door knocking, the time spent was still valuable in promoting the project and encouraging calls to the charity.



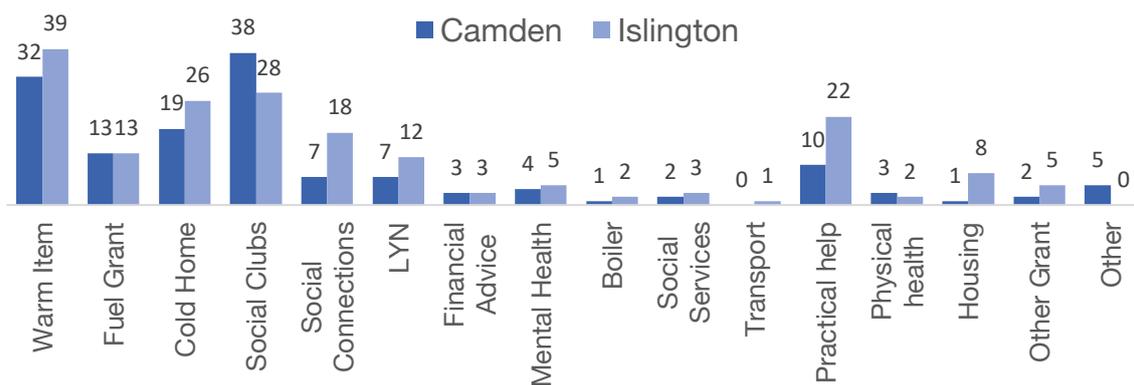
### 3.3 Additional referrals

	Camden	Islington	Total
Interventions from re-engagement	26	29	55
Interventions from incoming calls	91	104	195
Interventions from referrals	30	54	84
<b>Neighbours receiving an intervention</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Total number of interventions</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>334</b>

Re-engagement, referrals and incoming calls proved the biggest source of interventions this year. Re-engagement included conversations with older neighbours we already knew through our Love Your Neighbour programme and previous Winter Wellbeing projects, and survey calls at the end of this project.

Last year only three interventions came from community partners referring into Winter Wellbeing, so this year our Outreach Coordinator ensured time was invested in improving understanding of the project amongst new and existing partners. As a result, 86 referrals came via 13 community partners this year.

By far the greatest source of interventions came from incoming calls – an increase of 388% from last year. Calls came from people who had seen our poster or leaflet, people we’d met at community events or people who had read about the project in the local media or via our newsletter. While warm items, cold home referrals and social connections remained in, calls into North London Cares were also the biggest source of small winter grants and allowed conversations around mental health, financial advice, housing and practical and physical health to take place.



### 3.4 Types of interventions

	Camden	Islington	Total
Warm Item	83	73	156 (26%)
Small grant	18	15	33 (5%)
Cold home	37	46	83 (14%)
Social clubs	54	73	127 (21%)
Social connections	11	24	35 (6%)
Love Your Neighbour	10	18	28 (5%)
Financial advice	5	5	10 (2%)
Mental health	5	5	10 (2%)
Boiler repair	1	3	4 (>1%)
Social services	8	4	12 (2%)
Transport	4	3	7 (1%)
Practical help	23	30	53 (9%)
Physical health	8	7	15 (2%)
Housing	4	10	14 (2%)
Other grants	2	8	10 (2%)
Other	6	3	9 (1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>279 (46%)</b>	<b>327 (54%)</b>	<b>606</b>

Thanks to generous donations through our **Big Give Campaign**, we were able to offer cheques or food vouchers, up to the value of £100, to older neighbours facing high bills or a dramatic change in circumstances which could lead to further

isolation. 33 older neighbours split grants totalling £2,500, helping to ease their immediate anxieties, and support was offered to ensure better financial security for the longer term.

The biggest source of interventions came in the form of delivering warm items. With support from Partners Islington and donations from our Big Give Campaign, we were able to purchase more items, and a greater variety, than ever before. In total we gave 156 older neighbours 334 items to help them keep warm this winter.

68 Blankets  
34 thermos mugs  
36 gloves

35 hats  
79 pairs of thermal socks  
51 hot water bottles

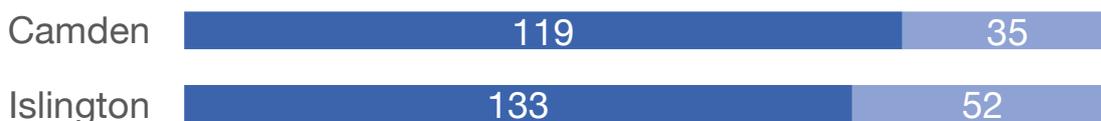
14 hand warmers  
1 snood



### 3.5 Demographics

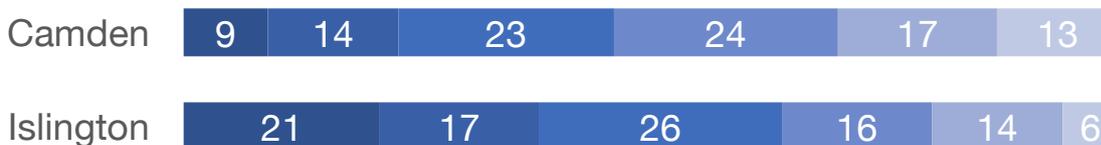
#### Gender of neighbours who received an intervention (where information retained)

■ Female ■ Male



#### Ages of neighbours who received an intervention (where information retained)

■ 65 - 69 ■ 70-74 ■ 75 - 79 ■ 80 - 84 ■ 85 - 89 ■ 90+



## **4.0 Case studies**

*"I've never had help like this before and I'm so grateful."* **Helen, 66**

Helen called in after seeing a flyer in the Islington *Partners Gazette*. Helen was coping with arthritis and chronic back pain, and without a pension had the agonising decision of choosing between health and heating bills. Helen received a winter fuel grant, a blanket and some thermal socks from North London Cares, helping her to keep warm at home. While chatting to Helen, she told us that everyday house work was challenging so we suggested the Attendance Allowance for daily care assistance. We signposted Helen to the Islington Council handyman service to help her paint her living room and GoodGym visited to tidy up her garden. Helen also told us that her old tumble dryer had broken and she couldn't hang washing out as her arthritis meant the job was too painful, and her home was too cold for it to dry inside. With help from Friends of the Elderly, Helen received a new dryer and her old one was removed for free. The next time we contacted Helen, she told us that she is now receiving the higher Attendance Allowance (after signposting to Age UK which we'd helped her with). Helen is now looking forward to using her additional money to purchase a new winter duvet.

*"If you weren't for your support, I would never have all of my issues sorted out."*  
**Sylvia, 76**

Sylvia heard about Winter Wellbeing through her church, St Mary's. Sylvia told us she lives in a basement flat which is cold and damp. A previous incomplete repair visit to remove growing mould in her living room meant Sylvia had to use her gas cooker to keep warm, as her radiators weren't hot enough to warm her home. Sylvia received a winter grant, warm items and a call from SHINE who sent round an energy doctor to heat-proof her flat. On Sylvia's behalf, we booked in an Islington repairs appointment to complete the job in January. Sylvia told us she now feels more at home in her flat than ever knowing she can be warm and cosy. Sylvia told us that she speaks to her son every day but has no regular visitors so we referred her to North London Cares' Love Your Neighbour programme. Already, Sylvia is enjoying North London Cares' social clubs.

*"The grant is brilliant and I am very pleased to have warm clothes."* **Garifallia, 73**

We met Garifallia at a Help On Your Doorstep community event in Islington. Garifallia was concerned about the broken radiators in her home – one of which wasn't working at all so her bedroom was freezing cold, and one of which was too hot. She didn't know how to turn the thermostat down but Garifallia told us her telephone bill was too high for her so she couldn't call the council to report issues with radiators. As a result, she had often had to choose between eating a good meal and paying her bills. Garifallia didn't want to make the flat cold or waste money by opening the windows either. We helped Garifallia with a fuel grant so she could better cope with her financial anxieties. She also bought food for the week. We also gave Garifallia a hat and gloves for when she goes out to do her shopping. And we referred her to SHINE for an energy doctor visit to fix her faulty radiators, to

draft-proof her windows and to advise on getting a better heating tariff. We also signposted her to a foodbank at her local Co-operative and were pleased to hear that this job was completed in the same week. Garifallia told us how much of a difference these various interventions made to her life.

*"It was a lovely experience – we are so grateful."* **Marie, 91**

Marie lives with her daughter Ann who cares for her at home. Ann called North London Cares after receiving a Winter Wellbeing letter for her mum through the post. She told us that the letter helped ease anxiety for her mum to open the door when we visited for the first time. While chatting to Marie, we learnt that their home is freezing cold and it is a constant struggle to manage the high heating bills that come with having health problems. Marie received a cheque, warm items of clothing and a WISH+ referral for draft-proofing her flat. Marie told us it was perfect timing as her bill was generated a few days before and had increased by about £40 so this contribution covered that increase.

*"I just want to get out and feed the ducks."* **John, 69**

We met John through door knocking in Islington. John told us he had Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and couldn't leave the house because of breathing difficulties so most days were spent indoors and alone. His dream was to have a mobility scooter so he could leave his block and feed the ducks, but he couldn't afford the cost. Chatting to John, the team learned he had served in the Army so a referral was made to the armed forces charity, SSAFA. Thanks to their support John picked up his own mobility scooter in April - just in time for summer, and the ducks.

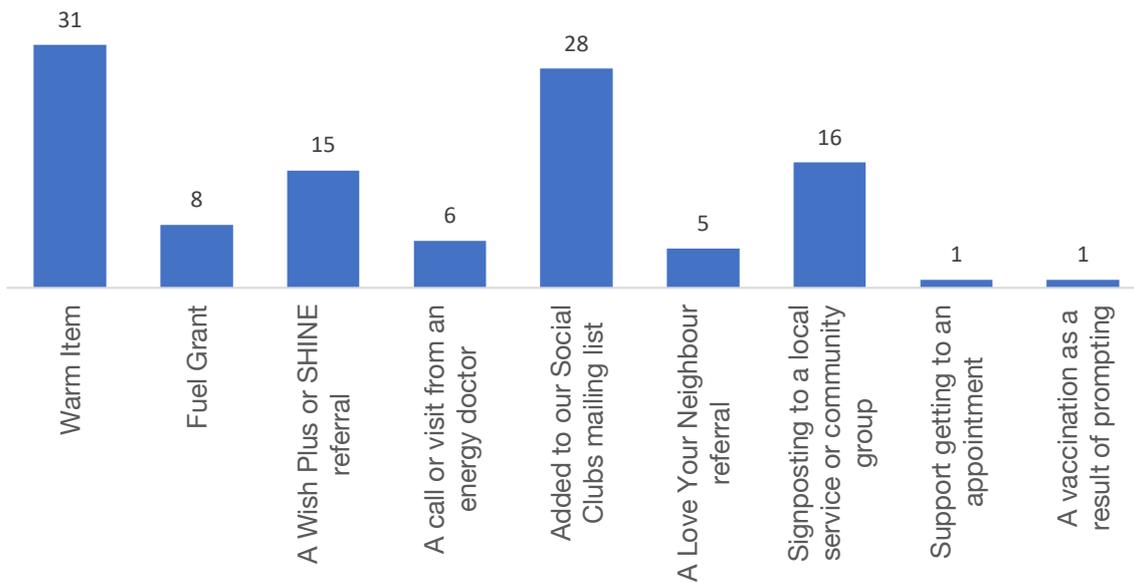
## **5.0 Evaluation**

### **5.1 Survey results**

In the final days of the project we conducted a survey with 40 randomly selected older neighbours who had received an intervention through this year's project (20 from Camden and 20 from Islington). This gave us an important insight into the project's strengths and challenges, as seen on the next page.

*"It's nice to know I can ring you up if I need anything".* **Jackie, 75**

Interventions received by those surveyed included:



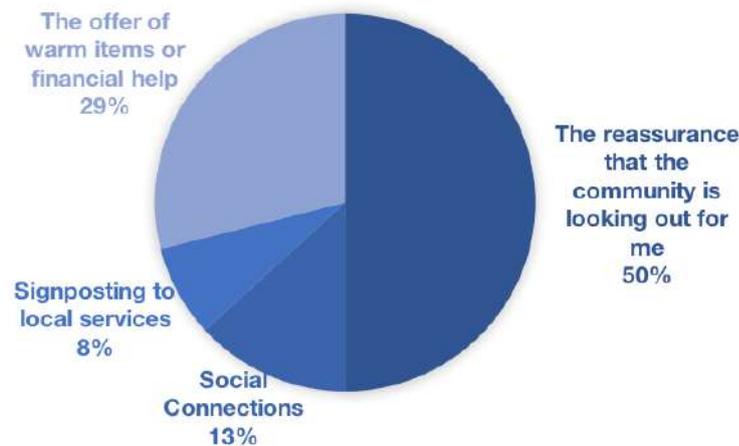
- **85% out of the 40 people surveyed felt that their original concerns had improved been resolved as a result of the intervention – an increase of 40% from those answering the same question in last year’s survey.**
- 78% felt that the project had improved their health and wellbeing;
- 18% saw improvements in their housing issues;
- 28% said their financial issues had improved;
- 70% felt better connected after receiving an intervention.

Limitations were highlighted by:

- Eight people who felt their issues were more complicated than the support available could allow for;
- Five people who felt that the intervention was too minor or did not fully resolve their issue;
- Five people had yet to access the service they required.

We also asked those surveyed “In your opinion, what is the most valuable aspect of the Winter Wellbeing project?”. 50% found comfort in knowing there was someone checking in on their health and wellbeing.

**93% of the people surveyed felt that door knocking should continue to be part of Winter Wellbeing.**



## **5.2 Project strengths**

This year's emphasis on community outreach and engagement has been possible due to stronger partnerships and processes established with referring organisations year-round. Clearer messaging on the North London Cares website, new relationships forged in the community and lunch and learn sessions with existing partners, to better explain the project, meant partners had a deeper understanding of how to refer into the project and this encouraged collaboration. We also had an intense period of community engagement from the very start of the project, which coincided with a cold start to the winter. Some older neighbours who we were due to contact via door-knocking had already been reached independently through community engagement.

*"I prefer to talk about my issues in my own home"*  
**Maud, 66**

By connecting with managers at sheltered housing units and independent living centres early, we were guaranteed entry when we began our outreach; often those manager relationships provided inside knowledge of the most isolated people in the block who could most benefit from an intervention. Door knocking accompanied by pop-ups in communal spaces meant people had the option of sharing personal issues in a private space, or in a social setting.

Time invested in researching local organisations and eight years' experience in the community, meant that this year our signposting was better than ever before, leading to support for more individuals who had a greater variety of concerns.

A reduction in door knocks this year allowed for a more time building trust through informal and friendly conversations with older neighbours. This resulted in deeper interactions and more opportunities to problem solve and follow-up, improving the experience for older neighbours. Visiting in pairs proved effective as the team felt

safe accepting invites into homes to fully assess need and felt supported during emotional and challenging conversations.

Fewer door knocks also resulted in more office time for our outreach team, which helped improve our follow-up of onward referrals. Our community partners had glowing feedback from older neighbours. Often referrals were dealt with in the same week or on the same day as we processed them – older neighbours were accompanied to hospital appointments, gardens were cleared, and thermostats were fixed. Grants from Friends of the Elderly benefitted older neighbours who were struggling and in need of furniture and we were able to quickly deliver warm items and arrange emergency small grants for those in desperate need. In our survey 85% felt their original concern had been improved or resolved thanks to the interaction, increasing trust in the project and benefiting future campaigns.

*"The money you gave me means I can now change energy provider and it feels like I've got my life back under control. And your speed and efficiency was astounding! I couldn't believe how quickly and easily you were able to help me." Vera, 75*

The leaflets and posters were a similar design to last year, making Winter Wellbeing a recognisable project to anyone who had heard about it over seven previous years. Repeated messaging in various forms, such as letters, leaflets in different sizes, and our new Winter Wellbeing packs, reminded older neighbours of the presence of this project and its benefits, long after the initial interaction. This is invaluable as we

*"I met the Winter Wellbeing team last year and have been invited to clubs for months but this is the first time I've built the courage to come. I've been missing out, I should have come sooner!" Anthea, who has since attended 20 clubs in six months.*

often find older neighbours can take months or even years of repeated communication before they build the courage to get involved in North London Cares' activities. Re-engagement calls with older neighbours boosted the number of interventions towards the final stages of the project. Speaking to people who had help before but were struggling once again with another issue reinforced the need for constant support and checking in year after year.

### **5.3 Challenges**

The emotional challenges related to door knocking remained a theme of this year's project. The unknown of knocking on a door, with no prior knowledge of the person's situation meant the team encountered some hostility, racist remarks, complex mental health needs and distressing situations which are beyond our remit. Disappointment also stemmed from the team's inability to communicate the project's benefits to people who did not speak English as their first language. The team also knocked on the doors of people who had recently passed away, re-awakening grief for loved ones. Challenging conversations were frequent and

required strong resilience. Training and working in pairs alleviated some of the adversities of previous years but these remain difficult components of the project.

Another challenge was navigating and identifying discontent due to hallucinations from a mental health issue versus real life concerns, complicating social services referrals. The Winter Wellbeing team also referred people to activities, who appeared suitable for social clubs in person, not knowing how they might behave in a diverse group setting, leading to some confusion for both parties later.

Secure doors proved a barrier, particularly on estates in Camden. We were unable speak to people if an older neighbour did not let us into the block, if they did not hear the buzzer, or if the buzzer was broken. Often we found that door knocks to addresses with care boxes would not be answered out of fear, distrust or simply people's inability to get to the door.

Despite a detailed signposting directory, we were only able to find very limited support services for people needing help with their shopping or those looking to attend hospital appointments in Camden. Travel also continued to pose an issue for many, with older neighbours losing trust in the reliability of community transport. This year we weren't able to refer as many older neighbours to Love Your Neighbour in Camden due to a volunteer sign-up deficit. Though we were able to signpost neighbours in Kilburn, Hampstead and Primrose Hill to Good Neighbour schemes, older neighbours living outside those areas are still waiting for a match. We will continue to seek new friends for them through our core, ongoing work.

It was also notable that throughout the project we met considerably more women than men. In Islington, only 28% of our interventions supported men, while in Camden, just 23% of those who accessed help were male. Research suggests that older men are more likely to be isolated than women so reaching them during the lonely winter months remains imperative.

Particularly in Camden, we met many older people living with their families who were their prime carers. For two-person households, often both individuals were isolated due to loss of independence from a chronic health conditions or a loss of social connections. When both older neighbours were facing deteriorating health, the older neighbour acting as a carer felt like they had no support for their issues. After one older neighbour had died, care partners articulated a loss in their sense of purpose and difficulty in turning to social networks for support. In these cases, signposting to Camden Carers and others could help lighten the load, but if services were unable to deliver quickly or holistically, people revoked their trust in accessing services altogether.

Finally, this year we experienced a mild winter, with the coldest time being between October and December. There was also a minor heat wave in February and a cold snap that didn't hit until April, after the project had ended. This resulted in fewer interventions towards the later stages of the project, compared to last year's efforts.

## 6.0 Recommendations

Whist signposting proved a strength of the project, continued research in the efficacy of those redirections is required to enhance future projects. Creating deeper relationships with the Citizens Advice Bureau in Camden and Islington and identifying specialist services around housing, and legal, debt and benefits advice will ensure the outreach team are knowledgeable and confident discussing these issues.

In Islington around 20% (39,400) of all residents do not speak English as a main language. Residents aged 70+ make up the largest proportion of people who cannot speak English well or at all, increasing the risk of isolation for this age group. The most common languages spoken in Islington after English are Somali, Greek, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Italian, German and Turkish. In Camden, other languages commonly spoken are Bengali, French, Spanish, Italian, Somali, German, Arabic, Portuguese and Polish. A recommendation for next year is to establish tailored partner relationships with organisations who are reaching out to these communities to ensure older neighbours are getting the support, care and advice they are entitled to and don't feel isolated if English is not their first language.

During year-round community outreach, we should continue speaking to pub managers, betting shops (especially as a tool for reaching older isolated men), charity shops, food banks, cafes, estate caretakers (for getting past secure doors in areas of high isolation) and community champions.

To continue developing door-knocking and coffee morning outreach with sheltered housing managers, we should be looking at the Brunswick estate, the Barbican and Clerkenwell areas where social isolation is prevalent. We could also organise more flyer drops with GoodGym runners, to spread the word in whole blocks or estates in areas with a particularly high risk of isolation.

*“You're the first person that's ever got back to me and done what they said they were going to do. Thank you so much and god bless you.”* **Brenda, 76**

In future years we should also continue to build on our relationship with mental health centres and care groups in Camden and Islington for referrals in and out of their organisations. Likewise, new partnerships with GPs should be based in known areas of isolation for referrals in and out of Winter Wellbeing and for the purpose of social prescribing. Our focus over the summer months will be to join up with GP neighbourhoods in Camden and develop relationships with more GPs in Islington. Establishing a referral partnership with Adult Social Care which is clear on exactly the types of activity North London Cares can and can't offer older neighbours will also improve the project and our overall work in future years.

We also plan to build partnerships with staff and members at local sports centres, for referrals in and out. And we are looking into opportunities to set up a partnership

with Royal Mail as part of the ‘Safe and Connected’ government pilot, and will continue to carry out street outreach in post offices.

Finally, year-round outreach to complement Winter Wellbeing will also remain a priority. In 2019 North London Cares will pilot its first summer wellbeing outreach project in seven years. Monthly re-engagement calls to maintain relationships with older neighbours and replicating the door-knocking model with social housing associations to regulate our presence throughout the year are also on the agenda.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

Connection and community are at the heart of everything North London Cares stands for. Whether through our social clubs, our Love Your Neighbour programme or the relationships built through our outreach, time is invested in building genuine friendships, where all parties feel valued, visible and encouraged to contribute. For this reason, since its inception, North London Cares has avoided words including "service", "clients", and "beneficiaries" – transactional words which suggest no mutuality or civic interaction – instead opting for phrases like "neighbours" and "friendship". This approach has allowed us to build trust in the community, encouraging open and honest conversations.

*“Winter Wellbeing is needed. I don’t trust officials, but I do trust North London Cares”. Hazel, 73*

The success of this year’s Winter Wellbeing project can be attributed to these core values as in 2018/19 we made a renewed effort to deepen relationships across the community. Clearer communication with local referral organisations and community organisations resulted in a better understanding of the project. Partners were able to see the collective benefits of working together and referrals were made both in and out of the project.

Quality time spent listening to older neighbours’ concerns, either in people’s homes or on a private chat over the phone, reassured people that someone was looking out for them and provided comfort to many of the neighbours we worked with. That helps North London Cares to achieve its aim of helping older neighbours to stay **connected**. In a time of rapid change and uncertainty, that is desperately needed across our communities.

