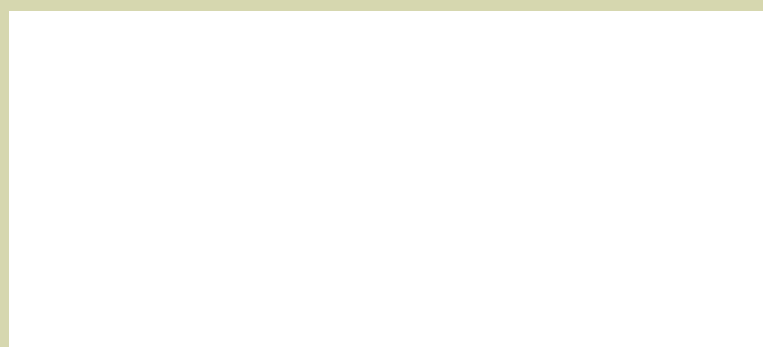


Health and Social Care Institute

CHASE

Centre for Health and Social Evaluation



**Evaluation of the
Redcar and Cleveland Community Agents
Project**

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

**A report prepared for
The Tees Valley Rural Community Council**

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Centre for Health and Social Evaluation (CHASE)

CHASE is a high quality research facility here at University of Teesside, which was established in 2006 to provide evaluation and research expertise for agencies in health and social care fields. It comprises a team of researchers from a variety of professional backgrounds with extensive experience of working with health authorities, local authorities, community groups and others involved in evaluation of health interventions. Experience includes evaluation of:

- health promotion programmes and campaigns
- community health initiatives
- service delivery in health and social care
- audit
- behavioural change programmes
- professional development and role change programmes.

The centre is based within the School of Health and Social Care and directed by Janet Shucksmith, Assistant Dean (Research) and Professor of Public Health, and Dr Sharon Hamilton, Reader in Nursing. Both have many years' experience of evaluating health and community interventions. As well as undertaking research contracts, the centre provides consultancy and advice, training in evaluation expertise, and a range of networking activities to promote good practice in evaluation.

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Summary Report

Project Overview

The Community Agents Project is an innovative approach to meeting the social needs of the elderly and vulnerable population. The project evaluation covers a 22 month period (June 2013-March 2015) which included a 4-month lead in period. The project has been fully operational since 30th September 2013. This report provides a summary of the final Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation and will reflect on inputs, outcomes for each stakeholder group and impacts.

The primary aims of the project are to demonstrate if a partnership between the voluntary and statutory sectors can increase capacity and increase support available for elderly and vulnerable people living in the borough of Redcar & Cleveland and at the same time reduce the strain on the health and social care budgets.

The purpose of the project was to:

- Support people to retain their independence and live safely in their own home
- Help people return home from hospital more quickly – speedier discharge
- Reduce admissions to hospitals
- Reduce admissions to residential care homes
- Engineer more appropriate use of the health and social care services
- Encourage cost savings in health and social care
- Improve quality of life for vulnerable and elderly residents in Redcar & Cleveland
- Reduce isolation.

The Community Agent Project operates in 3 areas (Greater Eston, Redcar-Coastal and Guisborough) and is designed to identify and meet the non-clinical needs of elderly and vulnerable people in these areas. Health and social care representatives refer clients with social needs which they see as impacting on their health and wellbeing, their living independently, lengthening stays in hospital or lead to repeat admissions to hospital. Three Community Agents were appointed with the responsibility of developing the project, establishing relationships and developing referral processes across the sectors and to identify existing relevant services which could meet the needs of clients.

Outputs

From September 2013-March 2015 the Community Agent Project has received a total of 748 referrals across the borough of Redcar & Cleveland. Community Agents have referred clients to over 70 organisations in order to provide access to services.

Co-production

This project was designed and implemented using a co-production model. Such a partnership approach is not common across health and social care and it is therefore a model worthy of note and deserving of further study. This co-production model has been a key factor in terms of both strategic and operational development and implementation. Jointly funded by health and social care as a demonstration project to test its ability to influence health and social care priorities, meet the needs of elderly and vulnerable adults and improve access to services.

Health and social care representatives have continued to work closely with the delivery partner in all aspects of planning, designing and implementing the project, providing support and access to training and also guiding the development and progress of the project.

Demographics

- The Eston area received the lowest proportion of referrals (25%) while Redcar and East Cleveland received 40% and 35% respectively.
- Almost two thirds of people referred to the Community Agents were female (61%).
- The majority of people referred were aged over 60 years (76%).
- A breakdown of clients by age – under 60's (19%), 61-75 years (23%), 76-85 years (31%), over 86 (21%).
- The majority of referrals came from social care (57%) with 17% from health – community matrons, OT's etc.
- As the project has progressed there has been an increasing number of self-referrals (15%).

Needs

The Community Agents are continuing to meet a wide range of needs. These include:

- Befriending
- Benefits advice and information
- Form filling
- Social Activities
- Transport
- Shopping
- Odd jobs/property maintenance
- General support and information

Befriending (18%) continues to be the most requested service, highlighting the prevalence of social isolation across the area. The need for befriending continues to be higher in East Cleveland with 45% of requests from that area compared to only 33% in Redcar and 22% in Eston.

Over half of the requests for befriending were from the East Cleveland area. Requests for transport, benefits advice and form filling have continued to increase substantially over the one year period.

Developing Networks

The Community Agents have developed good links and referrals processes with more than 70 organisations. They continue to map existing services across the statutory, public, voluntary and community sectors. They have become a first point of contact for many health and social care professionals.

Social Return on Investment Evaluation

Stakeholders

Four stakeholder groups were identified as beneficiaries of the project. They were:

- Community health professionals
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Voluntary Sector
- Elderly and vulnerable adults

Overall the evidence gathered in the evaluation supports the view that the work of the Community Agents has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for each of the stakeholder groups.

Community health professionals

1. Reduction in anxiety and depression

- Community health professionals report a range of changes brought about by Community Agent input that are impacting on the health and wellbeing of their clients
- Health professionals report a difference in attitudes to healthcare of patients supported by the Community Agents
- Patients are more socially active thus reducing stress and anxiety

2. Patients more actively engaging with health professionals and medication requirements

- Patients are feeling happier and are engaging better with health professionals and taking more care with their medication
- Some visits to patients are shorter and some are discharged more quickly
- Patients are more settled with their care packages

3. Reduction in Did not Attends (DNA) at GP practices and hospitals

- Some people are attending appointments as a result of transport being available
- People feel better about attending appointments because they now have volunteers to support them in reaching the right department and during the consultation is they want this

4. **Reduction in “frequent flier” bed days**
 - Patients with more manageable long term conditions are beginning to cope better because of the support they are receiving to address their practical and social needs
 - There has been some reduction in repeat short term admissions to hospital as people’s sense of wellbeing is improving
5. **Staff time saved sourcing non-health related services**
 - Having Community Agents as a first point of contact has saved community health professionals large amount of time sourcing non-health services
 - A minimum of 127 hours have been saved to date

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

1. **People staying in own homes for longer**
 - There is a perception that people are managing to remain in their own home for longer because they can access general support more easily
 - Elderly and vulnerable clients are coping better with daily tasks such as shopping and property maintenance as a result of Community Agent input
 - Supporting social needs of clients has delayed crisis points which are likely to have resulted in admission to residential care
2. **Delaying need for more complex care packages**
 - As people perception of their own health has improved as a result of Community Agent input they maintain the status quo for longer so have not needed to increase their care packages as anticipated
 - Delaying the need for more complex care packages reduces care costs
3. **Improved access to wider council services**
 - Community Agents have raised awareness of existing services available through the local authority
 - A total of 77 clients were referred to and have accessed wider local authority services for support
4. **Time saved sourcing relevant low level support and interventions**
 - Having Community Agents as a first point has saved social care professionals large amounts of time sourcing low-level support services not offered under the FACs criteria
 - A minimum of 426 hours have been saved to date

Voluntary Sector

1. **Increased capacity within local communities**
 - Using data from the Community Agent Project to evidence need, an application to the CCG for Vital Health Volunteers to recruit and train new volunteers in the area was successful

- TVRCC expanded the Transport Brokerage Scheme to include a Community Car Scheme to fill a gap identified by the Community Agent Project for volunteer drivers to transport people to health appointments and social activities
 - Some voluntary sector organisations have increased their volunteer numbers in order to meet the needs of Community Agent referrals
2. **An increase in the number of volunteers**
- Community Agents have continued to promote volunteering and signpost individuals interested in volunteering to relevant organisations
 - As a result of an increase in volunteers from the Vital Health Volunteers Project, new volunteers are now providing services within some organisations to meet the need of Community Agent clients

Negative Outcome: Increased pressure on voluntary sector organisations

- The increase in referrals from Community Agents has meant extra work for organisations in terms of assessments and service provision at a time when their core funding is reducing

Elderly and Vulnerable Adults

1. **Improvement in health and wellbeing**
- Elderly and vulnerable people are reporting that their perception of their health and wellbeing has improved dramatically
 - People are managing their long term health conditions better
 - People are feeling less anxious and desperate just knowing that the Community Agents are there and will provide help and support when needed
2. **Improved financial status**
- Community Agents are playing a major role in ensuring clients receive their full benefit entitlements
 - Community Agents referred 80 people to the DWP for benefit checks, the majority of which resulted in increased benefits – primarily Attendance Allowance and increased pension credits
 - Care costs have been reduced and in some cases, free care, as a result of Community Agents taking an active role in completing financial assessment forms for clients
 - As a result of improved financial status, elderly and vulnerable people value the “peace of mind” as they are now able to pay for care if they need to
3. **Reducing social isolation – improved social networks**
- Elderly and vulnerable adults are becoming more socially active and as a result are preventing the more extreme effects of loneliness and isolation on their health
 - A total of 131 clients have been referred for befriending services, many of whom now have regular contact with a volunteer
 - A total of 39 people are now accessing social activities on a regular basis
 - A further 77 people identified as socially isolated are now accessing a combination of befriending services and engaging with social activities

4. Increased self confidence

- By improving social networks and activities elderly and vulnerable people report feeling much more confident in themselves
- People are continuing to attend activities for longer periods of time without volunteer support and are engaging with additional activities
- Social networks have improved substantially
- People are often re-establishing old friendships and developing new ones

5. Retaining independence

- The perception of health and social care professionals and elderly and vulnerable clients is that they are able to remain independent in their own homes for longer as a result of Community Agent support
- People are able to manage and maintain their properties, access equipment for longer
- People feel safer in their own homes
- People less likely to have serious falls

Social Return on Investment

The results show a social return on investment of **£7.38** for every **£1** invested in the Community Agents Project.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the Community Agents have filled a gap both in terms of knowledge and understanding of the voluntary sector. They have adopted the role of “link person” or bridge between the statutory and voluntary services. In doing so they are successfully ensuring that elderly and/or vulnerable people are able to access a range of services that otherwise it is very likely that they would have missed out on. At the same time they have continued to develop their networks within both sectors as well as establishing good relationships with a wide range of smaller community organisations across the Borough. The Community Agents appear to have created a niche for themselves that complements health and social care services and at the same time provides an additional level of care to clients that was largely inaccessible before.

There is also little doubt that the role of Community Agents has impacted on the way both health and social care professionals carry out their own roles. By dealing with requests for low-level, non-clinical interventions this has meant that health and social care professionals are no longer required to source such interventions and that this in itself is saving them a lot of time. It also means they are less concerned about patients/clients at discharge, as the Community Agents will be around and they are trusted to refer back if this is needed. There is also some evidence to support the view that health and social care professionals are much happier, as they had been increasingly frustrated by the fact that they were unable to provide support for their elderly and vulnerable clients. The relationships between the Community Agents and health and social care professionals have developed over time and

remain positive. The numbers of people referring patients/clients to Community Agents for services continues to increase; however, there does not appear to be a whole-team approach to referring across either Health or Social Care and referrals are predominantly through individuals within teams.

Community Agents are approached to deal with a diverse range of social and low level needs, all of which are likely to have impact on health and wellbeing and clients' ability to maintain independence. Reducing social isolation was a core aim of the project and Community Agents have ensured positive outcomes for clients in this area. Support with finances and accessing both social and medical activities have all served to improve clients' perception of their own health and wellbeing, increased their income, led to many of them becoming more socially active, having increased self-confidence and generally feeling well supported, thus reducing levels of depression and anxiety.

While the voluntary sector has struggled to provide some services and as a result there is a waiting list, this is predominantly for befriending services. Some voluntary sector agencies have developed their volunteer base to meet the needs of Community Agent referrals and the Vital Health Volunteer Project was developed to further address any shortages. Relationships between the voluntary sector and Community Agents have generally been largely positive and, as a result of Community Agent input, it is fair to say that some organisations have increased their capacity to meet those additional needs.

The evidence supports the view that the ability to address the social needs of these clients has resulted in some of them remaining independent in their own homes for longer. Both health and social care professionals were able to provide examples of clients that they had expected to become in need of full time residential care sooner rather than later, and they have no doubt that this has been delayed by the support provided through the Community Agent project. Similarly there is also a view that Community Agent input has also delayed the need for more complex care plans for some clients.

Health professionals also reported some very positive changes in the way some clients were engaging with health professionals and taking their medication more effectively as a result of their feeling better about themselves, feeling more in control and being able to get out more. This was an unanticipated outcome.

While many of those referred to the scheme do have a long term condition or continuing health needs, the results of which often bring about depression, anxiety, social isolation, for many these health needs will continue. However, Community Agents are impacting on promoting a more positive approach to dealing with such conditions by increasing clients' social networks, reducing their worries and concerns (particularly finance related ones) and improving access to practical services to ensure they are able to feel safe and secure in their own homes and also that their homes are well maintained.

The Community Agents Project was primarily designed as a signposting service but also to solve practical challenges experienced by people in the community and those being discharged from hospital. Community Agents are also providing support by supporting by form-filling, helping clients respond to letters etc, and they are increasingly providing such

practical support to clients. The role of the Community Agents appears to have developed over time and they are increasingly called upon to deal with complex needs requiring a wide range of services.

The Community Agent project has managed to become a conduit for both health and social care. Community Agents offer an extensive knowledge of available services across all sectors, have developed and maintained positive relationships and have shown their capability for meeting demands on services across the two years, but more importantly at peak times such as the winter periods. Referrals tended to increase following the Christmas period which is believed to be largely due to heightened feelings of loneliness following that period. Service provision was maintained even at peak times. Client satisfaction with the project continues to be high, and key referrers' satisfaction has also been consistently high throughout the period of operation.

This SROI evaluation shows that the Community Agents Project has created a significant social value of £7.38 for every pound invested into the project. This is based on a robust evaluation process using qualitative style interview techniques to ensure that any assumptions and estimates used are realistic and based on information provided by the key stakeholders.

The project has created a social value for each of the stakeholder groups involved. Stakeholders from the health sector would appear to accrue little actual value, although the qualitative interviews highlighted that community health staff were clearly benefiting from their involvement with Community Agents.

People using the services clearly gained the most value from project activities and outcomes, with 62% of social value accruing to this stakeholder group. This further highlights the effectiveness of the service in reaching, providing services and linking services to this group of people and its importance in improving their health and wellbeing generally.

Given the positive response by both the health and social care sectors, it has now been agreed that the Community Agents Project be funded for a further year, in part by Redcar & Cleveland Public Health Department and by the Better Care Fund. This will ensure that the ground gained to date and the expertise and learning will not be lost, should a decision be made to include Community Agents as a service provider for social prescribing in the future.

The South Tees Better Care Fund is adopting a single point of contact concept for health and social care and given the success of the Community Agents to date, it has been recognised that they would be a valuable asset within this framework and already there have been discussions about their fit within the social prescribing element although these discussions are at an early stage at this time.

Overall the evidence supports the view that the Community Agents project has been successful in meeting many of its aims, has achieved some significant outcomes for stakeholders and particularly for service beneficiaries and can show that it has successfully created social value for all the stakeholders concerned, with an SROI of £7.38 for every £1 invested in the project.

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.
Please contact CHASE +44 (0) 1642 342967, email chase@tees.ac.uk
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