

Health and Social Care Institute

**CHASE**

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Centre for Health and Social Evaluation

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

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Redcar and Cleveland Community  
Agents Project**

**OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES  
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 at Teesside University, 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 projects and campaigns
- community health initiatives
- service delivery in health and social care
- audit
- behavioural change projects
- professional development and role change projects.

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 a jointly funded programme through health (South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust) and adult social care services (Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council). Such a partnership is not common and it is therefore a model worthy of note and deserving of careful study. Its success is dependent on health, social care and the voluntary sector working together to meet the needs of local people.

The Community Agents Project is an innovative approach to meeting the social needs of the elderly and vulnerable population. The project has now been fully operational for twelve months and this report reflects on the outputs and outcomes achieved so far.

The aim of this project is to demonstrate the capacity of a partnership of voluntary sector agencies and the statutory sector to support vulnerable people living in the borough of Redcar & Cleveland. The Project is operating in 3 areas (Greater Eston, coastal areas and Guisborough) as a way of identifying and meeting non-clinical needs within the localities. The intention was to align closely with the existing health and social care provision for residents. Community Agents have been appointed with responsibility for developing the work across the borough. The timescale of the project is September 2013 – March 2015.

## Outputs

The Community Agents Project has received a total of 486 referrals across the borough of Redcar & Cleveland for the period September 2014-September 2015.

### **Demographics**

- The Eston area received the lowest proportion of referrals (23%) while Redcar and East Cleveland received 39% and 38% respectively
- Almost two thirds of people referred were female (64%)
- The majority of people referred were aged over 60 years (74%)
- Breakdown of clients by age – under 60 years (26%), 61-75 (22%), 76-85 (28%), Over 86 (24%),

The majority of referrals came from social care (55%) with 18% from health – community matrons, community health professionals. As the project has progressed there has also been an increasing number of self referrals.

### **Needs**

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

- Befriending
- Benefits Advice
- Form Filling
- Social Activity

- Transport Shopping
- Odd jobs/Maintenance
- General support and information

Befriending (20%) continues to be the most requested service, highlighting the prevalence of social isolation across the area. 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.

### ***Co-production***

The Community Agents Project was developed using a co-production model with representatives from health, social care and the voluntary sector actively involved in the design, development and implementation of the project at both strategic and operational levels.

### ***Developing Networks***

The Community Agents have developed links with more than 60 voluntary sector organisations and have continued to map existing services across the statutory, public and voluntary sector.

## **Outcomes**

### ***Maintaining Independence***

- Service users appear to have been enabled to manage in their own home for longer
- Good relationships have been established between Community Agents and health and adult social care teams
- Clients have been supported in accessing additional services
- There has been a faster turnover of clients on caseloads
- Clients are engaging with health staff and taking their medication properly
- Health and community care staff note the reassurance that the Community Agent scheme has offered them. When signing off clients they know that clients will still receive support
- Keeping people in their own homes can reduce cost and strain on social care budgets.

### ***Faster discharge from hospital***

- It has been established that some social work referrals include people being discharged from hospital, and work is now underway to ensure this is more clearly recorded in the future
- The Home from Hospital Service is now fully operational and provided by RVS
- Community Agents have made little headway in establishing this element of their service and, given that the new RVS Home from Hospital Service is in place, this raises the question as to whether Community Agents are needed to do this or whether this would be a duplication of an existing service.

### ***Reducing admissions to hospital***

- Service users are reporting improved health and wellbeing as a consequence of contact with Community Agent service
- Community matrons are seeing a marked reduction in “frequent fliers”
- Health professionals are seeing a reduction in re-referrals to their services
- More practical solutions mean some service users are less likely to have accidents resulting in admission to hospital.

### ***Reducing isolation***

#### *Positive*

- Approximately 100 service users are in regular contact with befrienders
- Approximately 25 service users are accessing social and physical activities on a regular basis with another 20 on a more ad hoc basis
- Service users have a greater awareness of services and activities available to them
- Clients report an improved sense of wellbeing as a result of these contacts
- Clients report increased confidence as a result of these contacts.

#### *Negative*

- Shortage of volunteer befrienders
- Added pressure on voluntary sector
- Invisible costs of increased referrals on already tight budgets in voluntary sector
- Relationships between Community Agents and some voluntary sector agencies are beginning to deteriorate as a consequence of the pressure.

### ***Improved financial status***

- Support has been provided through Community Agents to help clients with completion of Financial Assessment forms for means tested benefits and as a result some clients are in receipt of free or subsidised care packages
- There have been over 70 successful applications for additional benefits
- More accurate costings for care
- A high proportion of clients referred to DWP/Welfare Rights are now in receipt of additional benefits
- Clients have reported reduced financial pressures and a greater sense of wellbeing as a consequence.

### ***Appropriate use of health and social services***

- Existing services within the local authority are being used more effectively as a consequence of Community Agent work with clients
- Clients are able to access a wider range of community services as a result of Community Agents
- Community Agent input has resulted in increased knowledge and awareness of existing services.

### ***Cost Savings***

- Community health teams are reporting approximately 92 hours of time saved dealing with social issues for clients they refer to Community Agents

- Social work teams are reporting approximately 226 hours of time saved dealing with social issues for clients they refer to Community Agents
- Working with data from community health staff it seems fair to assume that a minimum of 10 bed days can be saved through the reduction in admission of “frequent fliers”.

### ***Increases in community capacity***

- Funding to recruit, train and support additional volunteers has been secured
- The numbers of available volunteers is beginning to increase
- Community agents are identifying potential volunteers and referring them to relevant agencies for training and checks
- Service users are attending social activities in local communities on a regular basis.

### **Social Return on Investment**

The results show a social return on investment of **£3.29** for every **£1** invested in the Community Agents Project.

### **Conclusions**

Community Agents continue to provide a signposting and referral service for elderly and vulnerable residents. They provide hands-on support at time of crisis and refer to other services for longer term support. Numbers are continually increasing and the service is beginning to impact on the way health and social care staff carry out their own roles, particularly in terms of time saved, reduced frustration and increased confidence when discharging people from their service.

There is evidence to support the claim that the Community Agents are playing a key role in clients maintaining independence in their own homes for longer, reducing admissions/readmissions and ultimately bed days in hospital, reducing social isolation and increasing the financial status of clients.

An increase of referrals to voluntary sector agencies has raised some issues about their capacity to meet the needs of the clients in a timely manner and this is an area for further consideration. There is a clear need for additional volunteers and the Community Agents Project played a key role in securing additional funding to recruit, train and support new volunteers in order to build the capacity of the voluntary sector to better meet the needs of clients.

The Community Agents Project has been successful in achieving some significant outcomes for stakeholders and service users. The first year of the project has provided a solid foundation for future development in the future.

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