



Community Agents

What are Community Agents?

Community Agents are locally based people who are able to provide face to face information and support which enables older people (aged 50 plus) to make informed choices about their future needs.

They will bridge the gap between the local community and statutory and voluntary organisations by visiting older people in their homes and making referrals to organisations and service providers. Agents will act as facilitators in the provision of high quality information, promote access to a wide range of services and identify unmet need within their community.

Who is the service for?

Primarily the service will be provided for older people (aged 50 plus) but other disadvantaged and isolated people would also be able to receive Community Agent support.

How does it work?

Community Agents visit people in their own homes and actively put people in contact with services. After each visit a Community Agent makes, they are required to fill in an online referral, 'gateway' form. The form collects demographic data, the nature of the problem and other information relevant to any follow up visit. The referral form is then emailed to the required agency by the Community Agent for the query to be addressed. On referral, the partner agencies call the client and arrange for the service and/or visit.

It is crucial that agents maintain a high profile in their area so they may also arrange other activities such as giving talks in local community centres or writing a column on a community monthly newsletter in order to raise awareness of their role and available services.

Cost to clients

Agreeing to a visit and/or referral would not incur any cost at all for the client, and the majority of services would also be free. If there is likely to be a charge, the client will be made aware of it and given a free no obligation quotation. A referral will not commit the client to buying anything.

Time Commitment

Community Agents would be employed to work for 10 hours per week. However, in larger communities there could be scope for an arrangement where the agent could claim up to 5 hours of overtime per week.

What are the benefits of Community Agents?

The population is ageing and as a result changes need to be made to ensure that independent living is an option for as many as possible, for as long as possible.



Community Agents play an important part in this as older people are more likely to source information and access services through someone they know and trust.

The benefits of a Community Agent are that:

- Older people would have easy access to a wide range of information that will enable them to make informed decisions about their own well being.
- Older people would be in receipt of any services or assistance that can help them remain independent in their own homes and enable them to feel part of a supportive enabling community.
- Older people in Hertfordshire would feel more secure; more cared for and have a better quality of life.
- Links are developed between local services and the older community so more older people would feel engaged and able to influence the development of future service provision.

What services could be offered?

A referral system was developed for the Village Agents scheme in Gloucestershire which can be used to directly access services and information from partner agencies. The agents have individual log-ins to keep a record of their referrals. The partner agencies signed up to the Village Agents scheme in Gloucestershire are:

- Active Lifestyles
- Age Concern
- Care and Repair
- Cotswold Careline
- Fire and Rescue
- Gloucestershire Lifestyles
- Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
- Libraries, clubs, volunteers, housebound service
- RNIB Talking Books
- Stroud Careline
- Tewkesbury and Cotswold Helpline
- Adult Helpdesk
- Local Pension Service
- Carers Gloucestershire
- Cotswold Voluntary Centre
- Forest of Dean Linkline
- Good Morning Gloucestershire
- GUiDE and PALS
- Lydbrook Community Care
- Safer Community Team
- Stroud Volunteer Centre
- Warm and Well



However, agents contact other relevant agencies directly by email or telephone when appropriate.

Where would services from partner agencies be delivered?

All services from partner agencies would be delivered in the person's own home, through an appointment made at a time to suit the individual being visited. These appointments are usually made by telephone. All services would therefore be equally available wherever the person lives within Hertfordshire.

How soon are services provided after referral?

Each partner agency providing a service has its own response times, so the speed of service delivery will depend upon which services are required. However we would anticipate that the user will be notified of an appointment within 28 days.

Implementing a Community Agents scheme

How much would it cost to run a Community Agents scheme?

The Village Agents pilot in Gloucestershire received funding for just under £1,000,000 to set up and run the pilot between June 2006 and May 2008. To run the project the budget for 2008/09 was calculated to be **£320,000**. 50% of this funding was provided by the PCT and the other 50% was provided by the County Council.

How many older people can be 'reached' through one agent?

The scheme in Gloucestershire employs 30 agents who each have an area of between 450 and 4000 people aged over 50. The average number of people in a Village Agents area is 1300 and this is a comfortable number of people to work with. They have found that the agent with 450 older people in their area does not have enough work but similarly the agent with 4000 older people has far too much to do within 10 hours per week.

The scheme in Gloucestershire covers approximately 39,000 older people. However, there are 332,017 people aged over 50 in Hertfordshire and this needs to be taken into account when determining the resources needed to operate a similar scheme across Hertfordshire.

How many staff does it employ?

The Village Agents scheme in Gloucestershire employs 30 agents for 10 hours per week but there is the budget to employ 31 agents. Four of these agents are entitled to claim 5 hours overtime per week. There are also two project managers and one administrative assistant.



What tools do Community Agents require?

The Village Agents scheme in Gloucestershire provided each agent with:

- A laptop and printer
- Mobile internet access
- Mobile telephone
- A £2000 development budget

What training and development do Community Agents require?

Community Agents would have a two day induction on starting the role which introduces them to the commonly used agencies, explains the referral system and informs them of their responsibilities.

On a monthly basis, agents attend a district council meeting where they share knowledge and experience and receive updates on specific local issues. Every three months, the agents attend a training session together to train them on countywide issues.

Each agent is given a training manual on starting the role and they are also encouraged to telephone the adult social care helpdesk with any problems.

In addition, all agents require current CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) clearance.