



Winter Wellbeing

2015/16

Project evaluation report

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1.0 Executive summary

As a community network mobilising young professionals to take the time to make connections – and friendships – with their older neighbours in our rapidly changing capital city, South London Cares' aim is to tackle isolation, increase social interaction, and connect older people up with the many excellent people, places, activities and services across Southwark and Lambeth *throughout* the year.

However, we know it is particularly important to address isolation in winter. With shorter days and the threat of snow and ice, neighbours already suffering or at risk of isolation can find themselves even less likely to leave the house. As a result, they're less likely to access the resources that can make life easier, and less likely to enjoy the relationships that make life worth living. Moreover, they're more likely to suffer serious mental and physical health consequences, deepening pressure on health and social care services even more. Indeed – and it is a tragedy – excess winter deaths are currently at their highest since 1999, and a majority of those avoidable deaths are older people.

That's why, following on from our sister charity North London Cares' four successful past winter projects, and South London Cares' innovative pilot in 2014/15, this year South London Cares ran our second Winter Wellbeing project. The project helps neighbours over the age of 60 to stay **warm, active, healthy and connected** during the most isolating time of the year, and to connect them to our year-round social clubs and one-to-one programmes.

Over the course of this year's project, our Winter Wellbeing team spoke face-to-face about staying warm, healthy, active and connected with **1,175 older neighbours**. Of these, **360 people (31%)** received further help – or “interventions” – as a result of those initial interactions, a 145% increase year-on-year. The fact that more than one in three of the people we spoke to readily took up help suggests a significant need for this type of community outreach. There are hundreds of stories that attest to its urgent demand. There's Patrick, who hadn't been for a haircut for two months: we took him to the barber and **then introduced him to a young volunteer** for weekly visits. We've now recruited a wider team of volunteers to fix up Patrick's garden. Or John, who'd lost six and a half stone after battling throat cancer. John's clothes no longer fit him but he couldn't afford new ones to keep him warm: we gave him a grant so he could buy a coat and a jumper, meaning he could get outside.

While the Winter Wellbeing project has expanded in scope and quality this year, we know that more can be done to **improve** it in future years. While we were able to work in conjunction with other local organisations to deliver a project that made a big difference to hundreds of older neighbours, we have seen how valuable a closer partnership with **local authorities** can be. For instance, this year North London Cares' project was commissioned by Camden and Islington's joint Public Health department, who provided lists of addresses of older neighbours who were contacted both by letter and in person.

This **targeted approach** created meaningful efficiencies: identifying older neighbours was less time-consuming, allowing the Winter Wellbeing team north of the river to engage with, and therefore support, more people – and to solve **more people’s health and wellbeing** problems in a **more timely way**.

Future Winter Wellbeing projects could be dramatically improved and neighbours given a far **more accessible portal to local community activities** and health services through closer partnership with Southwark and Lambeth Councils – and specifically through access to data protected address lists. Such an improvement would enable us to be **more pro-active** in reaching those **most in need**, and therefore more **preventative** in our approach, ultimately **saving the Councils money** and improving **access to services**.

And yet this year, without the address data at our disposal, we were inspired to innovate, reaching out to areas of the community that we had not engaged with before. It’s clear therefore that even without targeted lists the project has demonstrated its value. In the context of increasing winter pressures on the NHS, the **rapidly ageing population**, the increased likelihood of more extreme and unpredictable weather events, and **further imminent reductions in local authority budgets** across departments, we believe the Winter Wellbeing project can and should become a **mainstay of local public health** and community provision.

2.0 Introduction

Since 2011/2012, South London Cares’ sister charity, North London Cares, has worked with local authorities and other community partners on its Winter Wellbeing project. The aim of the project is to ensure that older people in our target boroughs remain **warm, active, healthy** and **connected** during the winter months. Last year, South London Cares, in its first operational year, piloted its own Winter Wellbeing project.

This gave us an understanding of the topography of Southwark and Lambeth: where and why vulnerabilities exist, and how South London Cares could most appropriately, directly and collaboratively make a contribution. This year we built on the 2014/15 work and partnered with **London Catalyst**, the independent grant making trust, to deliver a project that not only reached more people, but also helped them more comprehensively.

Councils, healthcare providers, and other agencies are, of course, already on high alert during the cold weather. South London Cares’ Winter Wellbeing project aims to complement and deepen their work by offering a **community outreach dimension** in a way that larger organisations are often not able to.



From a strategic public health perspective there are two ambitions. The first is to make contact with those who may be **housebound or isolated**, to ensure that people who might otherwise be unforthcoming in accessing mainstream public services do not fall through the gaps in statutory provision.

The second objective is to take a **preventative approach**, identifying concerns early on so that they do not become emergency cases.

The core of Winter Wellbeing is therefore based around door-knocking at local older people's homes, or talking to them in the community – in supermarkets, GP surgeries or at the bus stop. In every case we aim to offer accessible, meaningful opportunities for interactions and interventions to potentially vulnerable neighbours through a combination of **conversations, friendships, provisions and referrals** to mainstream health and social services, as well as community activities including those provided by South London Cares ourselves.

Winter Wellbeing is an opportunity to **identify**, support and connect some of our more **socially isolated** older neighbours. The interactions that our outreach effort creates often have immediate as well as ongoing benefits, as neighbours join in with South London Cares' year round Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour (one-to-one) programmes.

This report outlines the impact of the above work, setting out the aims, methods, findings and evaluations we have delivered. It assesses what worked and what did not, with the intention that future Winter Wellbeing projects in future years can reach and make an ongoing impact to even more older neighbours in Southwark and Lambeth and beyond.

3.0 Context

Across Britain, the systems designed to offer dignity and opportunity in later life are under pressure. This creates a deep challenge: the older population is increasing right at a time when public sector cuts are shrinking services and people are living longer than ever.

In Southwark and Lambeth, the challenges are pronounced. In Southwark, three quarters of older people have a long-standing illness¹. In Lambeth, it is projected there will be a 43% growth in the 60+ age group by 2031, compared to a 16% projected growth for all ages². The increase in over-85s "will significantly increase age-related long term conditions and demand for care services"³.

Further deepening these challenges, older people in Southwark and Lambeth also face serious issues around isolation from the community. The trends of globalisation, digitisation, migration

¹ Page 63, The 2007 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for Southwark

² Page 12, [Lambeth: State of the Borough 2012](#)

³ Page 17, [Lambeth Local Development Framework](#)

and gentrification have re-shaped so much of London in recent years, and in Southwark and Lambeth these changes have been stark. The Peckham made famous in the television show *Only Fools and Horses* is now a hub for the creative industries and synonymous with young professionals. Meanwhile *The Independent* has noted that in “no part of London is the before-and-after effect of gentrification so marked as in Brixton”⁴.

Communities are fluid: only 50% of Lambeth residents have lived in the borough for over five years, and approximately 12% of the population leave each year and are replaced by new arrivals⁵. Where once people could expect to be surrounded by neighbours they knew well – frequently family members – anonymity is the new normal in our rapidly changing city. At the last census (2011), Southwark had the greatest proportion of social housing of any borough in England (31.2%)⁶ and yet alongside those homes the average asking price for private housing in the same area was £645,339.⁷

This social mix gives both boroughs an enormous amount of variety and dynamism, but it also means that social challenges and **public health inequalities** are at times magnified in ways they might not be elsewhere. This is particularly true for many of the older people South London Cares works with. Many grew up in traditional working-class communities – or else arrived in early waves of migration – and have witnessed a great deal of change. As the city transforms, people feel a **real sense of disconnection and isolation** from a world they believe is changing too fast, and too far beyond their control.

Meanwhile, changes in the climate have led to older people feeling anxious about unpredictable weather⁸. Very **cold winters** – like that of 2012/13 – which brought heavy snowfall and at least five bitterly cold snaps, bring with them fears of isolation. On top of this, the rising **cost of living** has led 4.5 million people into **fuel poverty**, and one in 20 older people unable to heat their homes⁹. And despite a mild winter in 2014/15, the Office for National Statistics recorded that there were **43,900 ‘excess’ winter deaths** (defined as the difference between the number of deaths that occur each winter (from December to March)¹⁰ in comparison to other seasons. That is a 140% increase on the previous year, and the **highest excess winter mortality rate for 15 years**.

Such **social, financial, environmental** and **emotional** conditions have the potential to create a crisis for older people: they can increase morbidity and mortality, deepen pre-existing medical conditions, and have a serious negative effect on **mental and physical health**. They also make socialising or visiting relatives more difficult, impacting on **wellbeing** and adding to

⁴ [The gentrification of Brixton: How did the area's character change so utterly?](#), The Independent

⁵ [Lambeth State of the Borough 2016](#)

⁶ Page 4, [Southwark Electoral Review](#), Local Government Boundary Commission for England

⁷ Page 2, Southwark Housing Market Trends, Bulletin No. 50, January 2016

⁸ [North London Cares: Community Resilience Report 2013](#)

⁹ [Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report, 2015](#)

¹⁰ [Excess Winter Mortality in England and Wales, 2014/15 \(Provisional\) and 2013/14 \(Final\)](#)

vulnerabilities. This is bad for individual neighbours, corrosive for our communities, and ultimately costly for our health services which are already under severe pressure.

South London Cares' Winter Wellbeing project delivers major community outreach during the **harshest time of the year**, through which, alongside our core Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes, we can help to tackle those **social and generational divides**, and to support local **public health priorities** by building the type of vital social bonds which might otherwise be undermined.



The project aims to identify isolated older neighbours in Southwark and Lambeth and to connect them to the people and places around them so that they do not feel **left alone** or left behind by the pace of change around them; so that they are able to access the services and activities provided by local authorities and other community organisations; and so they are able to **stay warm, active, healthy and connected** through the winter – and more a part of the city throughout the rest of the year.

4.0 Aims

The core aim of the Winter Wellbeing 2015/16 project was to identify people over the age of 60 who were at risk of isolation or struggling with the cold, and to offer **practical and emotional support holistically**.

This meant:

- Enabling older neighbours to remain **safe and warm** within their own homes through **preventative** activities targeting exposure to **excess cold and fuel poverty**;
- Improving **access** for older neighbours to health and housing services and grants and benefits that they may be eligible for, through **information and direct referral** into these local authority provided services;
- Ensuring that older neighbours who are **socially isolated** are identified and connected to community activities such as South London Cares' **Social Clubs** and **Love Your Neighbour** programmes.

In order to fulfil the aims of the project, South London Cares offered a range of different interventions, including:

- The delivery of **blankets, coats, gloves and thermal socks** for neighbours we identified who were struggling with the cold;
- **Small grants of up to £100** for neighbours struggling with fuel poverty and rapidly changing circumstances related to winter that could deepen isolation and/or anxiety;
- Distributing resources and leaflets outlining **local authority health, housing and social care services** to:
 - Promote discussions about maintaining good winter health, including through:
 - *Flu vaccinations;*
 - *Heating checks and home insulation;*
 - *Ensuring sufficient food is in place;*
 - *Preventing falls;*
 - *Offering handyman work;*
- Offering follow up **visits, phone calls and connection** to South London Cares' Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes to people identified as being socially isolated or at risk of social isolation;
- Referrals to Age UK Lambeth, Age UK Lewisham and Southwark and Southwark and Lambeth Councils' Safe and Independent Living (SAIL) scheme for people in need of:
 - *Benefits advice;*
 - *Health advice (memory loss, weight fluctuations, substance misuse);*
 - *Assistance with home repairs;*
- Other referrals to Council and/or other agencies including Adult Social Services, Citizens Advice, Advising London, Action on Energy, Age UK Lambeth and Age UK Lewisham and Southwark where necessary, to address issues such as complex **mental health needs, financial difficulty, physical health and occupational therapy** needs, **housing issues** including insulation, and **social care** provisions.

5.0 Approach

Unlike our sister charity North London Cares, which this year ran its fifth consecutive Winter Wellbeing project **commissioned** by Camden and Islington's joint Public Health department, South London Cares was unable to obtain access to lists of addresses of neighbours over the age of 60 from our partner local authorities due to differences in **data protection** approaches.

We therefore had to **think creatively** about how we could identify older people who were struggling and/or isolated in the colder months.

Last year this led us to focus on a combination of social events attended by older people, and identifying neighbours in sheltered housing units, particularly those in which South London Cares was already hosting social clubs. Upon evaluation, however, we concluded that although in many cases we were identifying cases where urgent help was needed, we were also occasionally overlapping with other organisations. As a result of offering help to those who were already provided for we were missing vulnerable neighbours beyond sheltered housing units or people not already taking part in social activities, who had not been identified through any of Southwark and Lambeth's other cold weather services.

For this reason we trialled a new approach this year, in an attempt to widen the net of people we were reaching. We chose 10 areas in our two boroughs in which we already had a presence through year-round South London Cares social clubs, and each week focussed on one of those areas. We combined our existing knowledge with thorough research of each area, identifying and contacting:

- Sheltered housing units (prioritising privately owned sheltered housing units where we had not met neighbours the year before and where connection to Council services may have been lower);
- Community centres;
- Local groups and support networks such as food banks;
- Businesses that older people who are alone are more likely to frequent, such as pubs, betting shops and pharmacies.



We also reviewed the (somewhat approximate) data we had on where many older people lived in the area, and formulated a focussed week-by-week outreach plan. This approach enabled us to reach out to older neighbours who were most likely to have slipped through the gaps in statutory and other provisions, who were not currently engaging with local services or activities and who were therefore most at risk of social isolation.

6.0 Delivery

We began the project at the beginning of December 2015 and followed a pattern of outreach designed to coincide with our own and other organisations' community activity in the run-up to Christmas and beyond. Over the next three months through to the end of March 2016, we worked week-by-week through the following neighbourhood areas:

- West Norwood
- Peckham
- Bermondsey
- Stockwell
- Streatham
- Herne Hill
- East Dulwich
- Elephant & Castle
- Walworth
- Brixton

6.1 The project in practice: West Norwood (December 2015)

Our outreach work in West Norwood offers a typical example of our approach.

In West Norwood, we had 201 face-to-face conversations with people over the age of 60, and made 56 'deeper interventions' (referrals to local services or activities). These interactions took place in a deliberately wide variety of settings, including:

- The West Norwood foodbank;
- A South London Cares pop-up stall in the Co-operative supermarket;
- A film matinee in Carnegie Library (a social club run by South London Cares);
- A lunch with the West Norwood Pensioners Project;
- Door-knocking at five sheltered housing units;
- Chatting with patrons of two betting shops (Ladbrokes and Coral);
- Chatting with punters in a local pub (The Horns Tavern);
- Chatting with people at Norwood Road bus stop;
- A Christ Church coffee morning;
- Door-knocking at The Portobello Housing Estate;

We also put posters up or left leaflets in two places of worship and 18 businesses in West Norwood: four supermarkets, three pharmacies, one launderette, two cafes, two betting shops, one charity shop, one homeware shop, one pub, one advice centre, the post office and a pawnbrokers.

“I can honestly say that I've not felt so carefree and alive in a long, long time!”

Betty, who we met in West Norwood, at her first social club in Herne Hill.



6.2 Local organisations and businesses

We have learnt from previous Winter Wellbeing projects delivered by both South London Cares and North London Cares, that older people who feel left behind can also feel suspicious of new things and may therefore be unlikely to take up initiatives they haven't come across before. Obtaining the endorsement of trusted community partners was therefore essential.

Across Southwark and Lambeth, we wrote to 130 local organisations (statutory and third sector) whom we'd partnered with over the previous 16 months since South London Cares first opened, asking them to publicise the project and to refer any older neighbours who might need help to stay warm, active, healthy and connected.

We also wanted local businesses at the heart of the community – greasy spoons, off licences, pharmacies and launderettes – to play a big part in the project. We therefore spoke to managers at 129 local businesses across our target boroughs.

Although in previous years both North London Cares and South London Cares had found that engaging local businesses was not necessarily the most fruitful way to identify older neighbours who required deeper interventions, this year we received a sizeable number of calls from people who had seen our posters up in a local shop, enquiring about assistance for their friends or family. Some very dedicated community champions, such as Susan from *Billy Busters* cafe in Streatham Hill, even approached customers, told them about how South London Cares could help, and then called up on their behalf to arrange blanket deliveries and social club programmes.





Notably, we also collaborated with Age UK Lewisham and Southwark, joining their pop-up cafe in the Peckham Morrisons supermarket, meeting older people doing their weekly shops, sharing a chat and a coffee in the on site cafe, and signposting them to activities and services in the local area. Throughout the project we found that supermarkets were an effective setting for meeting older people who might not already be linked up with services that could help them to stay warm, active,

healthy and connected during winter.

6.3 Sheltered Housing Units

Over the course of the project we spoke to older neighbours in 42 Sheltered Housing Units. The majority of these interactions were door-to-door, one-to-one. In most cases, we created a flyer a week before visiting which the scheme manager circulated to all the neighbours in the unit. This meant people were more receptive to our visits: they knew we were coming and had already had an introduction to South London Cares activities and vision – and the objectives of the Winter Wellbeing project – making them more likely to answer the door and be open to a chat.

On some occasions, Sheltered Housing Unit managers did not want us to go door-to-door, so invited us to speak at their tenants' meeting. We found that on the whole this was a less effective way of engaging with residents: the meetings tended to be relatively poorly attended, and people were less likely to reveal problems that needed addressing in a group setting.



6.4 Community events

This year we had a valuable partnership with Age UK Lambeth who handed out our social club programmes as part of their winter packs, and invited us to all the community events that they had funded through their Warm and Well project. This led to presentations at a host of Warm and Well events run by organisations ranging from the Lambeth Chinese Community Association to the Clapham Park Project.



We met David at one such event at a library in Kennington, and encouraged him to attend South London Cares' social clubs. **David joined six social clubs in March**, and told us:

"I usually spend my days all by myself, so I can't tell you what it means to have discovered that nights like this are still possible at my age!"

We also found that these community events were a good way of reaching out to other community partners: for example we were invited to the Clapham Methodist Church weekly pensioners lunch after our talk at the Springfield Patient Participation Group warm and well event. The latter also offered to deliver our winter leaflets to the patients at Springfield Medical Centre who are housebound. These contacts are not just seasonal – we will stay in touch with every organisation we collaborated with over the course of the project throughout the year, and it is likely that referrals of older people to local activities will occur in both directions.

We also introduced the Winter Wellbeing project at South London Cares' own social clubs across Southwark and Lambeth, and mobilised advocates for the project that helped us spread the word – including at a dinner party with 73 people present (pictured right).



6.5 Community collaboration: case study

In December we met with the Creation Trust, a local charity on the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, to discuss our Winter Wellbeing project. They are a charity that supports people on the estate – ensuring they receive the benefits of the regeneration of the area. They agreed to publicise South London Cares’ projects through their quarterly magazine, The ECHO, which goes to every household on the estate. They also showcased our activities on their website, and invited us along to events for older neighbours in the area, to talk about the Winter Wellbeing project.

Consequently we attended a men’s cooking group, a weekly lunch club and a book club. At the latter we met Chris. She told us that she was living without central heating: her landlord would not install it because her home was in a conservation area. She described how the

night before **she’d been wearing two dressing gowns and was still shivering**, and that all she had in the way of heating was two halogen heaters – and she could only afford to turn them on now and again. We delivered a blanket and also awarded a grant of £80, which she said she’d spend on more cost-efficient heaters. She told us: **“This cheque is a godsend. You don’t know what a difference it will make. I’m much less worried about the cold now.”**



The Creation Trust also told Tony about South London Cares’ social clubs, persuading him to call us to find out more. On the phone he said:

“I’ve been alone for 30 years. Is it me? I find it so difficult to make friends locally. These events [South London Cares’ social clubs] are going to give me an incentive to do something with my life. Something to look forward to.”

The next day Tony came along to our brunch club in Streatham. He’s also come on a trip to the Cinema Museum in Kennington and for tea and cake at The Electric Elephant. He’s since told us how many fantastic people he’s met through South London Cares’ social clubs – from a 21-year old teacher, to David, another older neighbour, who drove him home from a social club as they live just a few streets from one another.

In total 10 people received deeper interventions through the Winter Wellbeing project thanks to our collaboration with the Creation Trust.

6.6 “Generic” door-knocking

We were aware that one of the weaknesses identified in the 2014/15 project was that a large proportion of time was spent engaging with people in Sheltered Housing Units, who were in most cases well looked after on a practical level, with 24-hour support from a shared sheltered housing manager and, sometimes, carers. Because bills were normally included in the rent, fuel poverty was less of an issue than it was amongst people living independently, and the sense was that even very small problems were being fixed quickly. This year, we therefore wanted to reach more older people outside of sheltered schemes: in private housing and in non-specialist council housing.



On the other hand, we were also aware that “generic” door-knocking – that is, knocking on doors on council estates recommended to us by the local authorities for identifying people who needed a deeper intervention – only yielded a handful of interactions with older neighbours, and that time was spent inefficiently talking to much younger, often working people.

This year we consequently limited the time spent on “generic” door-knocking, but included it in our multi-faceted approach for the 10 areas we had identified. We soon deduced that although knocking on doors was time-consuming and less successful in terms of ‘numbers’ (resulting in fewer interactions and interventions for time spent compared with the other approaches listed above), it was an important part of the project. The people we met on their doorsteps were often in need of urgent intervention – for example, Olivia, whose husband had very recently died, and whose boiler was broken, and Sherry, who lived alone, was immobile due to bowel cancer and arthritis, and whose very cold flat was hard to heat.

6.7 Corporate volunteers



This year we organised three Winter Wellbeing Volunteer Days, mobilising corporate volunteers from **Ernst & Young** and our long-term partners **Octopus Investments**. This added a valuable dimension to the project. It helped us to engage with more older people and created connections between young professionals and their neighbours who often live side by side but inhabit different worlds. Volunteers spoke at coffee mornings, engaged with older neighbors at sheltered housing units, and got local businesses in Peckham, Elephant and Castle and Bermondsey involved with the project.

6.8 Letters

In January, we wrote to each of the 400 older neighbours on South London Cares' social clubs mailing list, introducing our Winter Wellbeing project and offering help in the colder months. This outreach approach worked well – people already within our network responded to request assistance with everything from draughty windows to mobility scooters.

We also personally wrote to each person who had received a deeper intervention through last year's Winter Wellbeing project. Of these, 9% responded to say that they needed further help. Others got in contact via phone to articulate that although they did not want further help, they appreciated South London Cares getting in contact:

"I'm just calling to say how grateful I am that you've been writing to me this year. I've been really ill, so I haven't been able to participate, and I don't want anyone to visit me in my home at the moment. However if I feel better, I will call and I know that you'll be there. You've been good friends to me." **Kim, Gypsy Hill**

7.0 Project summary

7.1 The project in numbers

This year, the Winter Wellbeing project was even more ambitious than last year, with more than twice as many blankets delivered and grants awarded, and more than double the number of "deeper interventions" compared to last year.

Specifically:

- **1,175 face-to-face conversations** were held;
- **360 older neighbours** received **further help**;
- **1,992 leaflets** containing cold weather advice were given to older people;
- **22 libraries** also distributed those leaflets to their memberships;
- **27 small grants of up to £100** were given to those in most urgent need;
- **98 blankets** were delivered to people who felt cold in their homes;



- **18 lots of warm clothes** (coats, fleeces, thermals socks, gloves) were delivered;
- The project mobilised **22 young professional volunteers**, predominantly from our corporate partners and especially Octopus Investments;
- **129 businesses** displayed South London Cares' Winter Wellbeing posters;
- We gave Winter Wellbeing presentations at **25 community events**;
- We had conversations with older people in **42 Sheltered Housing Units**.



7.2 Case studies

Numbers are important, but they do not tell the whole story. Part of what makes the Winter Wellbeing project a success is its highly personal approach: we treated every person we met as an individual, spending time listening to their problems (with no time limits to conversations), and helping people to access what they needed – regularly helping to make sense of confusing forms or online processes.

Here are a few of those stories:



Just before Christmas we met **Frank** at a Christmas lunch held in his local GP surgery. He's in his nineties, and his wife of over forty years had died earlier in the year. We had a long conversation and he described the magnitude of his sense of loss. He said he was warm at home and wasn't interested in attending our social activities, but gave us his address, and we've been keeping him in the loop with what we have going on in his area. In April 2016, five months after our first interaction, Frank attended our monthly Streatham brunch club for the **third** time.

We met **Margaret**, 82, while door-knocking at a sheltered housing unit in December. Margaret was chilly, and we gave her a blanket. She was keen to meet new young people in her area for more company, so we connected her to Leighann through South London Cares' Love Your Neighbour programme. Leighann, who lives just up the road, now visits each week for a cup of tea and a chat. Margaret told us that the visits make her **"feel that I'm wanted. I love it because it lifts me up a bit."**



We met **Mary**, 84, in Herne Hill, door-knocking at a Sheltered Housing Unit with corporate volunteers. At the time she thanked us but told us she didn't need our assistance, and we left a leaflet with her. A month later Mary called South London Cares and asked if we could help her get hold of social services. Mary has macular degenerative disease and wanted to see if she could get some specialist lighting for her flat, to make living independently easier. We contacted social services on Mary's behalf and made a referral, and they visited in March. She told us: **"Without you I don't think I'd ever have got hold of them."**



While door-knocking in December we met **Patrick**. We took him to get a haircut that month, as he hadn't been out in two months or so. He'd lost his confidence to walk by himself, and said he felt 'like a real person' after his haircut.

We connected him to Lucy through our Love Your Neighbour programme, and she's been visiting] each week ever since. Patrick told us he **"loves the craic, having a laugh and being able to go out more often"** with a friendly face. Before we introduced him to Lucy he talked about not seeing a soul for days.

Wayne, 73, was diagnosed with cancer three years ago, which, on top of other struggles, makes walking and therefore getting out of his flat difficult. But he told us the main reason he didn't get out very often was because of his jacket. He'd had it for 15 years, it was thin, and the lining was ripped all over. We gave him a grant to purchase a new warm coat. He told us: **"Thank you, thank you, thank you... I'm so grateful – and I'm not so worried about going outside"**.

8.0 Project strengths

Winter Wellbeing is both ambitious in its scope and personal in its approach. This combination of breadth and depth makes it a challenging project to deliver, but the benefits for older people living in Southwark and Lambeth are clear. Specifically, we felt the project this year was a success because:

- Of **the number of people we connected** to our own and other local community and statutory services;
- Of the clear increase in South London Cares' social club attendance;
 - Between the end of November – when we launched the Winter Wellbeing project – and the end of February, **social club attendance increased by 107%**.
- We limited the project to **10 areas** which we were able to research thoroughly, allowing for a more focussed and comprehensive project. Flyers were targeted for each area or specific Sheltered Housing Units, meaning information didn't overwhelm and was easy to digest.
- The personal approach and **lack of bureaucracy** (no confusing forms for older neighbours to fill out) meant people could relate to the project on a human level;
- We built a number of **successful partnerships** with other local community groups and increased South London Cares' profile in the community;
- We involved **corporate volunteers** – which also led to fundraising;
- We were able to execute the project efficiently and to time;



9.0 Project weaknesses – and recommendations

There are also a number of challenges in delivering a project of this scale and with so many people and moving parts. Specifically:

- Although we had the resources available to help more people, because we didn't have **aggregated lists of addresses** from our partner Councils, more of our team's time was spent attempting to find people who could benefit from our assistance, rather than providing the help.
- We spent a large amount of time visiting Sheltered Housing Units and attending community events. However, people who attend community events or who live in sheltered housing units are *generally* connected up with services already (although we provided a considerable number of important interventions in the form of social activity), and well provided for in terms of warmth (in fact, a common complaint is that it's too warm in some of those units). We need to identify **more older neighbours in private housing**.
- We know from our sister charity North London Cares' experience that with **lists of addresses** targeting the specific demographic and provided by the Councils, the Winter Wellbeing project is able to spend more time focusing on helping **those most in need**.

* **Recommendation:** Discuss with Southwark and Lambeth Councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups whether there is an opportunity to **partner more formally** and therefore target isolated people more efficiently.

- Researching, planning and making contacts in each of our 10 targeted neighbourhood areas took longer than we had anticipated.

* **Recommendation:** The majority of **planning** should take place before the Winter Wellbeing project begins, so that from December to March the team can focus on outreach within the community and immediate intervention follow-up.

- Setting up visits to sheltered housing units took time – particularly when they were private. Trying to get the contact details for the scheme managers was time-consuming and in many cases unsuccessful.

* **Recommendation:** Meet with housing associations in **summer 2016** to discuss the Winter Wellbeing project 2016/17. Look to obtain a list of scheme managers in the area, so we can more efficiently and recognisably speak to more neighbours in those units.

- Deeper interventions are more likely when **interacting one-to-one** (e.g. through door-knocking) – older neighbours are unlikely to reveal serious problems within a group.

*** Recommendation:** When booking group events, always **schedule an extra 30 minutes** after presentations have taken place to talk to people one-to-one.

- We spoke at more community events in Lambeth than in Southwark, mainly because we had a close partnership with Age UK Lambeth, who invited us to all of the events they funded. We met with Age UK Lewisham and Southwark in January to discuss attending and speaking at the events they were funding too, but by then most of their winter events had already occurred and the remaining dates clashed with events already in the Winter Wellbeing team’s diaries.

*** Recommendation:** meet with both Age UKs Lambeth and Lewisham and Southwark **in summer** to discuss how we can best partner – and **keep in close contact** with both organisations throughout the project.

- 4 of the grants were awarded to people who did not have bank accounts (perhaps a signifier of their levels of isolation). We therefore had to collect the cheques we’d delivered and provide vouchers instead.

*** Recommendation:** Halfway through the project we started **asking over the phone** about bank accounts. In future we could go one step further and help people to set up bank accounts (if wanted), once their immediate problems had been addressed.

- Some older neighbours needed help in areas that we hadn’t encountered before – for example, we helped a woman terrified of going to the dentist who was in need of urgent dental care. This meant we often had to spend some time **researching available services**, and it became apparent that services we contacted in the hope of being signposted also weren’t aware of some of the brilliant services available in Southwark and Lambeth.

*** Recommendation:** South London Cares will create an **internal services map** for both Southwark and Lambeth, building on the very useful information in the Age UK directories, to ensure that we can help people to access the relevant services as speedily as possible. We will also **write to every councillor** in Southwark and Lambeth to let them know about the work going on in their ward, so that they can help spread the word about available activities and services, and



let us know in turn about any services they are aware of. We also hope councillors will be able to help us to identify older neighbours we can assist.

- When we caught up with older neighbours who had received a deeper intervention through our Winter Wellbeing project last year (a financial grant or a referral to a local service) to ensure they were satisfied and secure, we were concerned that some were still experiencing the same problems they were encountering the year before.

* **Recommendation:** Follow-up calls should not stop once the Winter Wellbeing project is over: we should continue to check in with the most vulnerable throughout the year.

- Coordinating the speedy home delivery of **98 blankets** and **18+ lots of warm clothes** to over 100 households across the two boroughs took up a lot of our small team's time.

* **Recommendation:** Consider taking our partnerships with local businesses a step further, asking them to act as pick-up points for warm clothes and blankets, while continuing to personally deliver items to those who are particularly vulnerable or with mobility issues.

10.0 Conclusions

It is clear that South London Cares' Winter Wellbeing operation – a major community outreach project that values conversation over tick-boxes, agility over bureaucracy, and combines passion with professionalism – is valuable. But at a time when **winter pressure on the NHS** is huge, and one in 10 visits to the GP are made by people with no other condition than loneliness¹¹, highly personal community outreach is more important than ever.



There is evidently a desire and need for community outreach from older neighbours in Southwark and Lambeth who would otherwise find it challenging to access local health and social provision. **One in three** of the people we engaged with took up our offer of either extra **social connection or practical help**. The project rapidly transformed the number of people accessing our year-round services: in the month of November, there were **244** older neighbour attendances at our social clubs – by February, after three months of our Winter Wellbeing outreach, there were **505: an increase of 148%**.

Meanwhile the reaction from people who didn't require further assistance was **overwhelmingly positive**, suggesting that as well as providing interventions that both help to **prevent** and solve

¹¹ [Loneliness is the reason one in 10 visit their GPs claim charity](#), *The Independent*

problems, the project is a means of providing reassurance and strengthening ideas of community:

“Thank you so much for your letter. I’ll keep it as a lovely reminder that people want to help. I don’t need anything, but that you thought of me means a lot. I’m sure other people do need the support. Thank you.” **Lucille, Kennington**

The Winter Wellbeing project embeds a **preventative approach** whereby practical, social and emotional issues are **identified before they become emergencies** – and whereby people learn how they can get the support or connections they need to live more fulfilling lives.

For the direct investment that went in this year – £6,000 from our partners London Catalyst – the project had an impressive impact on the community. In the coming years, with **investment from community health commissioners**, and more planning and personnel resource, this impact can increase.

The project has huge potential to be even better: greater **integration** with local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups’ work, and access to **sharable data** on where older people are living would allow us to reach many more people.

As the populations in Southwark and Lambeth age, people live longer and other local authority services are reduced, it is vital that this holistic offer of practical, social and emotional outreach and connection during one of the toughest, most isolating periods of the year continues.

May 2016