



NORTH LONDON CARES

WINTER WELLBEING

2017/18 EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

Winter can be a time for comfort – chunky scarfs, heated homes, warming meals and a diary crammed with festive fun – but for many of our older neighbours it can also be a season which threatens their independence, company, security, confidence and health.

It is estimated that one person needlessly dies every seven minutes in winter.¹ Low temperatures increase the risk of those aged over 65 catching a cold or the flu, and with weaker immune systems this can prove deadly. High fuel costs can leave older neighbours with the dilemma of a freezing cold home or anxiety over significantly larger bills.²

In addition to the health implications, the darker evenings, freezing temperatures and icy conditions can leave older people feeling vulnerable and less able to leave their home – drastically increasing their risk of social isolation.³

‘Winter Wellbeing’ is North London Cares’ response to both the physical and mental challenges faced by older people during the difficult winter months. Now in its seventh year, the project aims to support people over 65 in Camden and Islington to **stay warm, active, healthy and connected**.

Through a combination of door knocking and outreach in GP surgeries, supermarkets, libraries, community centres and local businesses, the objective is to reach hundreds of older neighbours at risk of isolation, including those who are housebound or unable to access public services.

The intent is to provide an opportunity to explore a wide range of preventative and reactive interventions that could benefit older neighbours, through informal and friendly conversations on people’s doorsteps or in community settings. From health referrals to free social clubs our ambition is to ensure older people feel listened to, supported, informed and valued by their community.

This report outlines the process and impact of our work, setting out the aims, results and evaluations made to increase opportunities and continue improvement to the project for next winter and beyond.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/20/older-person-dying-winter-fuel-poverty>

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/12096564/Energy-prices-Six-in-ten-elderly-people-skimp-on-heating-to-cut-winter-fuel-bills.html>

³ <http://metro.co.uk/2017/12/24/why-winter-is-so-much-more-dangerous-for-elderly-people-7126865/>

2. Objectives

Expanding on our message of staying warm, active, healthy and connected, our key objectives for the project were:

- To enable older neighbours to remain safe and warm within their own homes through preventative activities targeting exposure to excess cold and fuel poverty;
- To improve the access for older neighbours to health and housing services, grants and benefits that they are eligible for through information and direct referral into these services;
- To ensure older neighbours that are socially isolated are identified and linked into community activities such as social networks, local groups and other community activities.

In order to fulfil these objectives, North London Cares pledged to:

- Target older neighbours (aged 65 and over) living in social housing in Camden and Islington;
- Deliver a pro-active door knocking and community outreach campaign;
- Distribute resources and leaflets outlining existing health, housing and social care services in order to:
 - Promote discussions about maintaining good winter health, including through:
 - Flu vaccinations;
 - Heating checks and home insulation;
 - Ensuring sufficient food is in place;
 - Making connections to local home maintenance services;
- Work closely with the WISH+ and SHINE teams (the councils' own seasonal health service portals) in Camden and Islington to address wider issues potentially impacting on individuals' health;
- Link people socially isolated or at risk of social isolation into community based social activities (provided by North London Cares and other partners);
- Provide emergency warmth such as clothing and blankets to people identified as being most in need;
- Provide emergency small grants to neighbours with urgent financial issues related to the winter – including people with pre-existing medical conditions exacerbated by cold weather, people on state pensions only, those whose circumstances had rapidly changed during the winter, and people with very high fuel bills.

3. Delivery

The Winter Wellbeing project is made up of a number of interactions and interventions, which together create a pro-active outreach approach used to identify isolation and connect older neighbours to the community. During the project we were able to have hundreds of in-depth conversations with the older neighbours we met through door knocking, community outreach, targeted letters and phone calls – these conversations are classed as ‘interactions’. ‘Interventions’ are the actions made to provide further help, including:

- Delivery of blankets or small items of warm clothing (thermal socks and gloves);
- Small grants of up to £100 for people suffering from fuel poverty or difficult circumstances related to the winter which might deepen isolation and/or anxiety;
- Signposting to North London Cares’ Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes, with further advice and follow up calls made to assist with journey planning and finding activities based on interests;
- Referrals to WISH+ (Camden) and SHINE (Islington) for those in need of:
 - Urgent boiler and heating repairs;
 - A visit from an Energy/Green Doctor to help keep the home warm;
 - Help with benefits and financial advice;
 - Support with physical and mental wellbeing;
 - Other domestic issues such as home repairs;
- Referrals to other council, local and national organisations and charities to help with a variety of issues, including; other social activities, help with complex mental or physical health needs, warm clothing, and financial support;
- Flu jab reminders and information on where to find a local clinic.

The project was delivered by two people (an Outreach Coordinator and Outreach Officer) with support from the Love Your Neighbour and Social Clubs teams who helped share the message.

3.1. Communications

Starting the planning and design of the project earlier than in previous years meant that we were able to promote the Winter Wellbeing message from September, with the project officially starting in early October. This gave us the opportunity to begin talking to older neighbours with a preventative aim and to encourage people to plan ahead for the colder weather.

One main flyer was designed, in house, to market the project. To allow variety, practicality and legibility we produced a double sided A5 flyer with large print to be given directly to older neighbours, as well as a larger A4 poster to be displayed in community spaces. The design was simplified this year to create clarity and an easily recognisable design. Aiming to create a repeated message of keeping warm, active, healthy and connected across the boroughs, we pushed to have them displayed in as many public spaces as possible, but with a specific focus on areas targeted for door knocking to help us maintain a consistent presence.



Project marketing materials (A4 Poster and double sided

The flyer included a picture of Sylvia – an older neighbour we met during the 2016/17 Winter Wellbeing project. As a result of knocking on her door Sylvia is now friends with Sarah, who visits each week. Not only picked for its relevance to the project, the picture reinforced the charity's aim of connecting older neighbours and the young professionals in their community.

3.2. Door knocking

"Sometimes I get leaflets but I don't bother to read them, I would have missed out. You came all the way here to talk to me – that's so much nicer than a leaflet!"

Shobha, 72, King's Cross

This year we pledged to knock on the doors of 1,000 social housing tenants aged over 65 – 500 in Camden and 500 in Islington. With the lessons learned from previous Winter Wellbeing projects, we set out to knock on fewer doors than in 2016/17 to enable more time with people and deeper interactions. Knocking on fewer doors also allowed the space to incorporate more community engagement, to increase exposure to the project and maximise the number of older neighbours receiving further help.

Before door knocking activities began, a letter (co-signed by North London Cares and Camden and Islington councils) was sent to all residents selected for a visit. The letter, which introduced Winter Wellbeing and informed people of our visits, was first sent to Camden residents in mid-October – with visits taking place in the borough until December. Islington residents were written to in December with door knocking following on until late February. The letters formed the first point of outreach, helped to legitimise the project and made it recognisable to people who may be wary of strangers knocking on their door. This was also helped by staggering the dispatch and for the first time including a Winter Wellbeing flyer in the envelope which served as a visual prompt during door knocks and summarised the project in simpler terms.

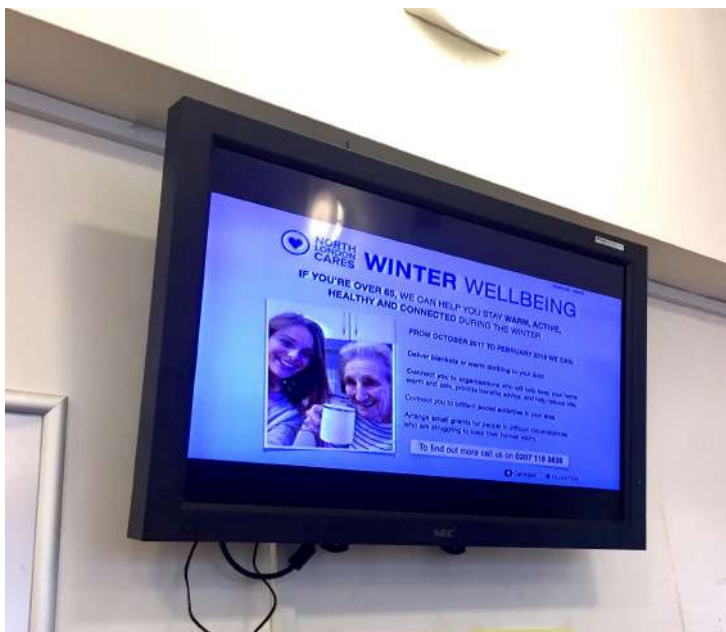
Around 30 people were visited on each day of door knocking with some of the most deprived areas in the boroughs targeted, including; Somers Town, King's Cross, Kilburn, West Hampstead, Highgate, Kentish Town and Gospel Oak in Camden, and Finsbury Park, Archway, Holloway, Crouch Hill and Caledonian Road in Islington.



3.3. Community outreach

North London Cares runs a year-round outreach programme focussed on meeting people in the community in spaces that are visited on a day-to-day basis. GP surgeries, supermarkets, pharmacies and bus stops have all been places we have met older people in Camden and Islington, and casting a wide net has given us the opportunity to meet people who might usually be reluctant to seek out social activities. This year we wanted to embed this approach into the Winter Wellbeing project to work in tandem with door knocking activities in order to reach more people. Community events attended or hosted included:

- Tea and coffee mornings in libraries;
- Stalls held in GP surgeries, pharmacies and supermarkets;
- Speaking to people at community events such as health and wellbeing days, local tea parties, and lunch clubs;
- Flyering and drop-in sessions in sheltered housing units;
- Flu jab clinics.



Winter Wellbeing screen displayed at Ampthill Practice

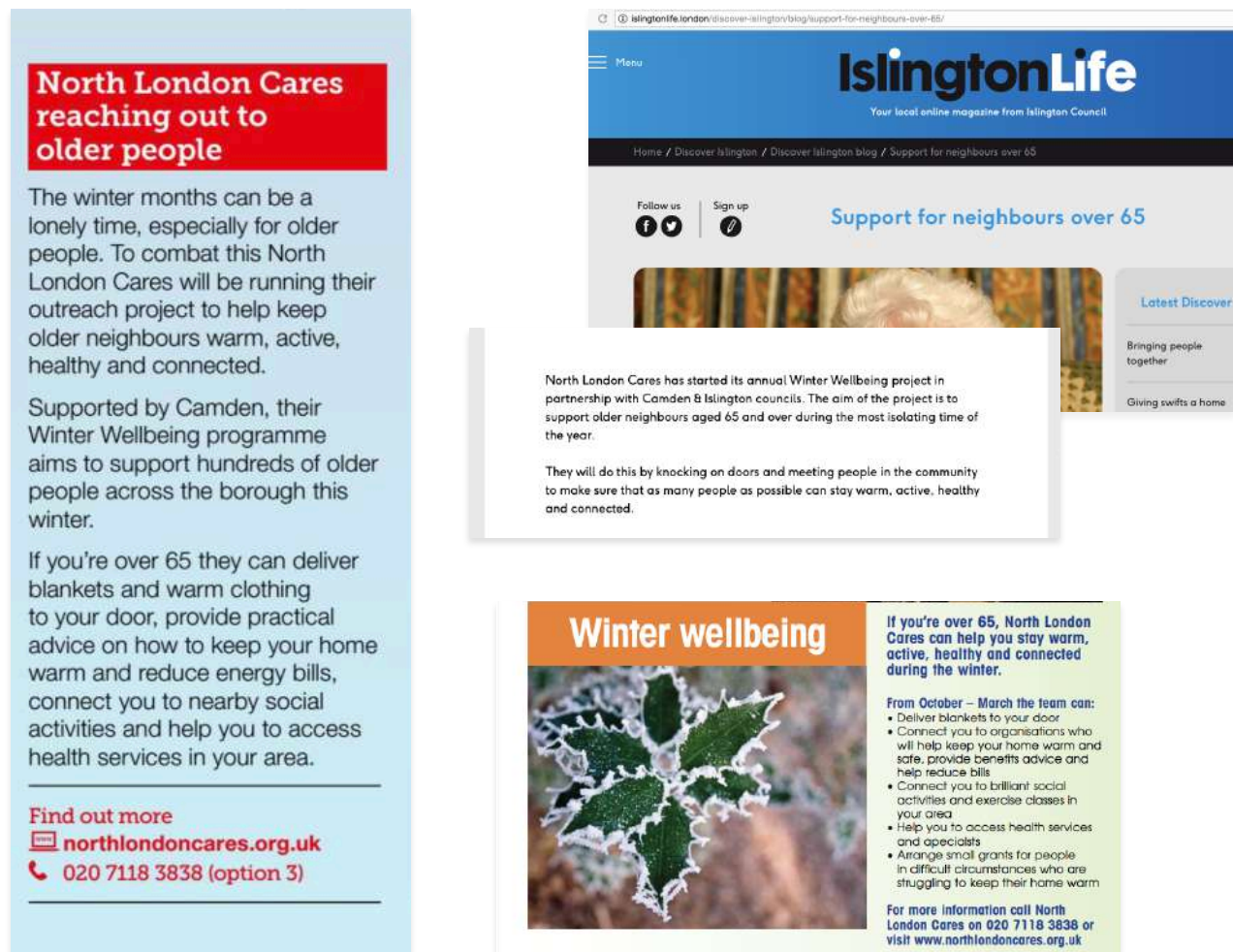


3.4. Community partnerships

Connecting with community partners and engaging external service providers works side-by-side with community outreach. This year we made a concentrated effort to work alongside people who may be the first point of contact for older neighbours, or who often make referrals themselves.

These included care coordinators, pharmacists, community centre managers, food bank volunteers, Dial-a-Ride drivers and local business owners. The intent was also to broaden the knowledge we have of services available, to improve our signposting and intervention delivery.

3.5. Media



Winter Wellbeing features in Camden Magazine, Islington Life and Partners Gazette

We aimed to utilise free advertising and marketing spaces in line with the start of door knocking, which was helped by creating our marketing materials early. Camden Magazine, Partners Gazette and Islington Life all supported the project with features.

3.6. Re-engagement

Seven years of Winter Wellbeing outreach has allowed us to meet thousands of older neighbours. Many of these people regularly attend our social clubs or are part of our Love Your Neighbour programme. However, we acknowledge that inevitably there are going to be people we lose contact with over time. Reaching people who may have become lonely or isolated is at the heart of the project, and this year we felt that re-engagement was an important part of achieving this.

Running alongside our door knocking and community outreach activities, we also planned a series of re-engagement activities targeted at older neighbours we had met in previous years. This included sending letters and making phone calls to people who had received an intervention through Winter Wellbeing in the past two years, and conversations through our Love Your Neighbour programme and at social clubs.

This side of the project also allowed us to adapt to changes in the weather. The cold spell and snow hit in February and March, which prompted us to get in touch with neighbours to check in with them and make sure their circumstances hadn't changed.



4. Project summary

4.1. Project in numbers



In 4 months we knocked on **972 doors** across Camden and Islington



731 conversations were shared with older neighbours



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



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



94 blankets and items of warm clothing were delivered to older neighbours who struggled to stay warm



The Winter Wellbeing message was shared at **32 community events**

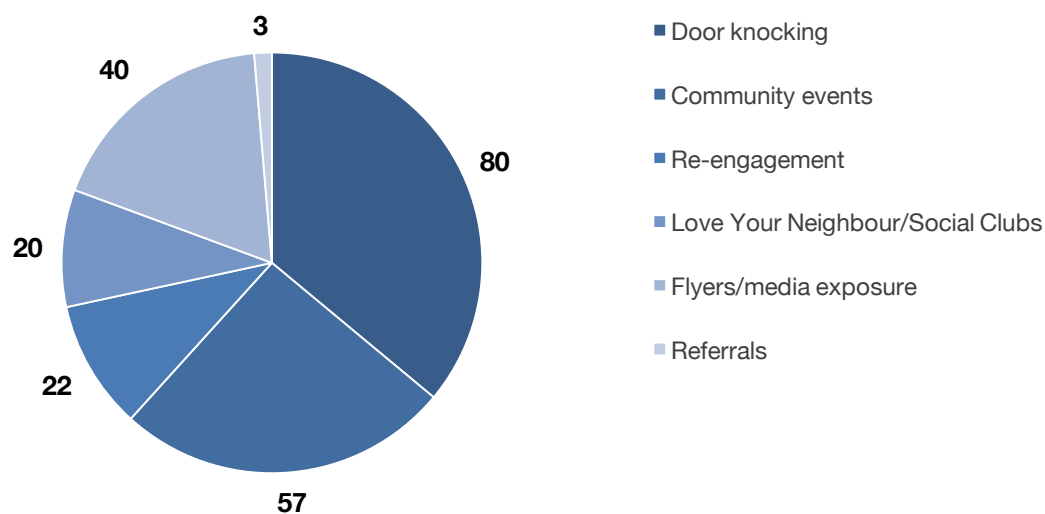


55 people were referred to WISH+ and SHINE, for help with housing and benefit worries, social care guidance and energy advice



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

Source of interventions



4.2. Door knocks

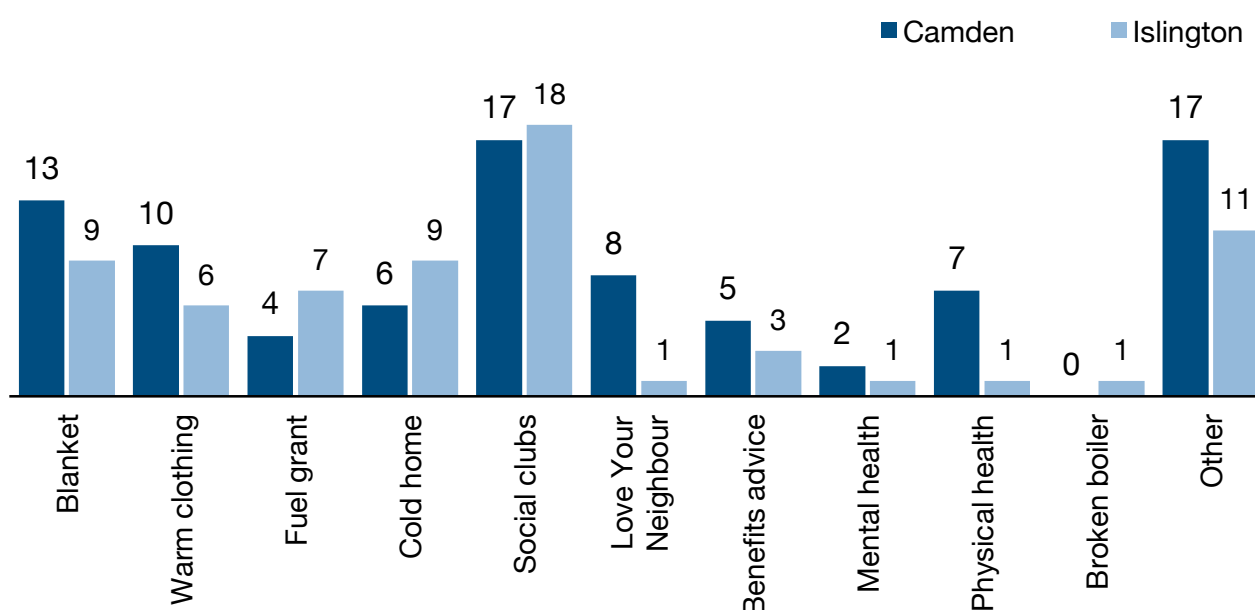
“The fact that you come to people’s doors is opening a whole world to them that they didn’t know existed.”

Michael, 77, Angel

	Camden	Islington	Total
Doors knocked	482	490	972
Neighbours receiving an interaction	119 (25%)	115 (23%)	234 (24%)
Neighbours receiving an intervention	43 (9%)	37 (6%)	80 (8%)
Total number of interventions	82	71	153

Door knocking has continued to be the backbone of the project but this year we adopted an even more person-centred approach. Knocking on fewer doors than in previous years allowed for more time to interact with each neighbour we met, with many inviting us into their homes for a chat. This gave us a chance to establish a connection, to understand each person’s situation and as a result to follow up with multiple interventions to try and support their needs. Knocking on fewer doors meant the targets were achievable for just two members of staff, allowing trust to be built with a small and familiar team. The results we have seen throughout the project and the feedback we received through our survey (see section 5.3) suggest that door knocking is still a highly effective way to reach older neighbours in need of support and at risk of isolation.

Interventions through door knocking



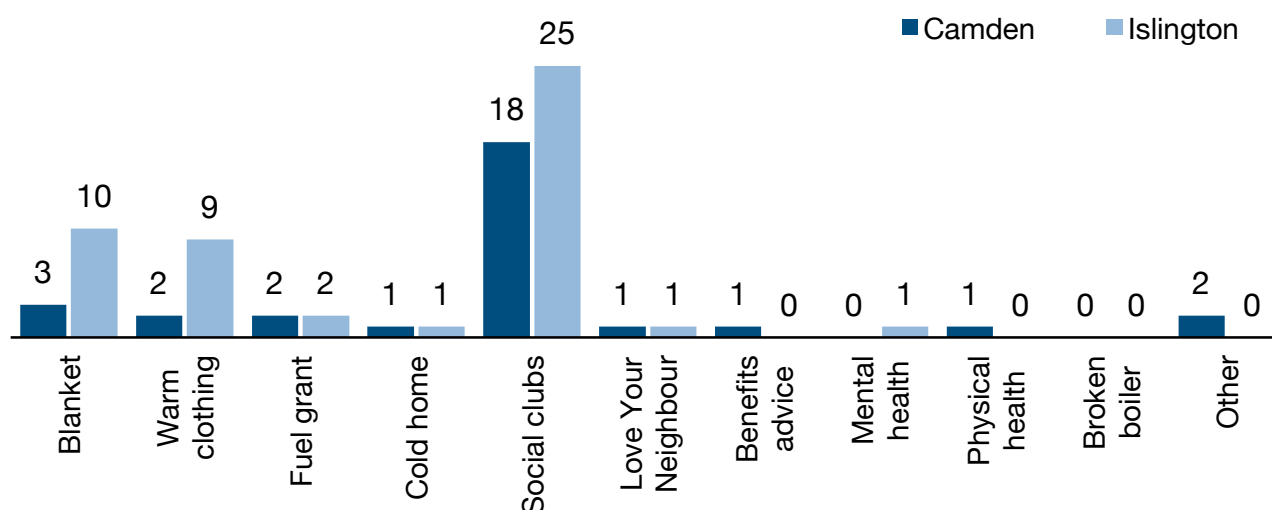
4.3. Community outreach

	Camden	Islington	Total
Number of community events attended	21	11	32
Neighbours receiving a leaflet	368	140	508
Neighbours receiving an interaction	223	142	375
Neighbours receiving an intervention	25	32	57
Number of interventions	33	50	83

We attended 32 community events during the project: 11 in community centres; 8 GP surgeries; 4 libraries; 3 sheltered housing units; 3 supermarkets; 2 churches; and 1 flu jab clinic. To maximise exposure to the project we arranged our community outreach activities to run alongside door knocking, so that we would have a presence in the community at the same time as visiting people at their homes. This was an effective way in layering the project's message, with people often seeing a flyer or meeting one of the team multiple times and in different places.

Community outreach is a valuable method of meeting people at risk of – or experiencing – feelings of loneliness. Some of the older neighbours we met this winter told us they often visit community centres, libraries and supermarkets just to be around other people. Many were often pleasantly surprised to be spoken to and some commented on the rarity of a simple “hello” from a stranger. Creating a space for people to engage with us in a community setting opened the door to friendly chats that often led to a deeper intervention – in most cases, connecting older neighbours to the range of North London Cares social clubs and a welcoming community nearby.

Interventions through community events





Community outreach in Crouch Hill and Hornsey Lane

4.4. Re-engagement and other activities

"It's so nice to get a phone call and to know there's someone checking up on me.

Thank you."

Sheila, 81, Kentish Town

	Camden	Islington	Total
Re-engagement letters/phone calls	84	27	111
Incoming phone calls	21	19	40
Referrals from community partners	0	3	3
Social clubs / Love Your Neighbour	26	29	55
Neighbours receiving an intervention	47	38	85
Number of interventions	75	58	133

This year we tried to incorporate re-engagement into our outreach efforts as much as possible. With Winter Wellbeing being in its seventh year, and year-round outreach being one of North London Cares' core programmes, it felt essential that we were checking in with people we have met before.

The extensiveness of door knocking and the focus on community engagement only allowed for approximately 20% of our time to be spent on re-engagement. However, the results were largely positive with many people welcoming the phone call or letter and thanking North London Cares

for checking in with them. It also gave us the opportunity to hear about improvements that had been made since receiving their first intervention in a previous year, with many people still using a blanket they had been given, enjoying a warmer home following a visit from an Energy Doctor or happy to continue receiving North London Cares' free social clubs programme each month. It can sometimes take people a long time to build up the confidence to come along to a social club, so being kept up to date with a monthly programme reassures them that there is no pressure to attend straight away.

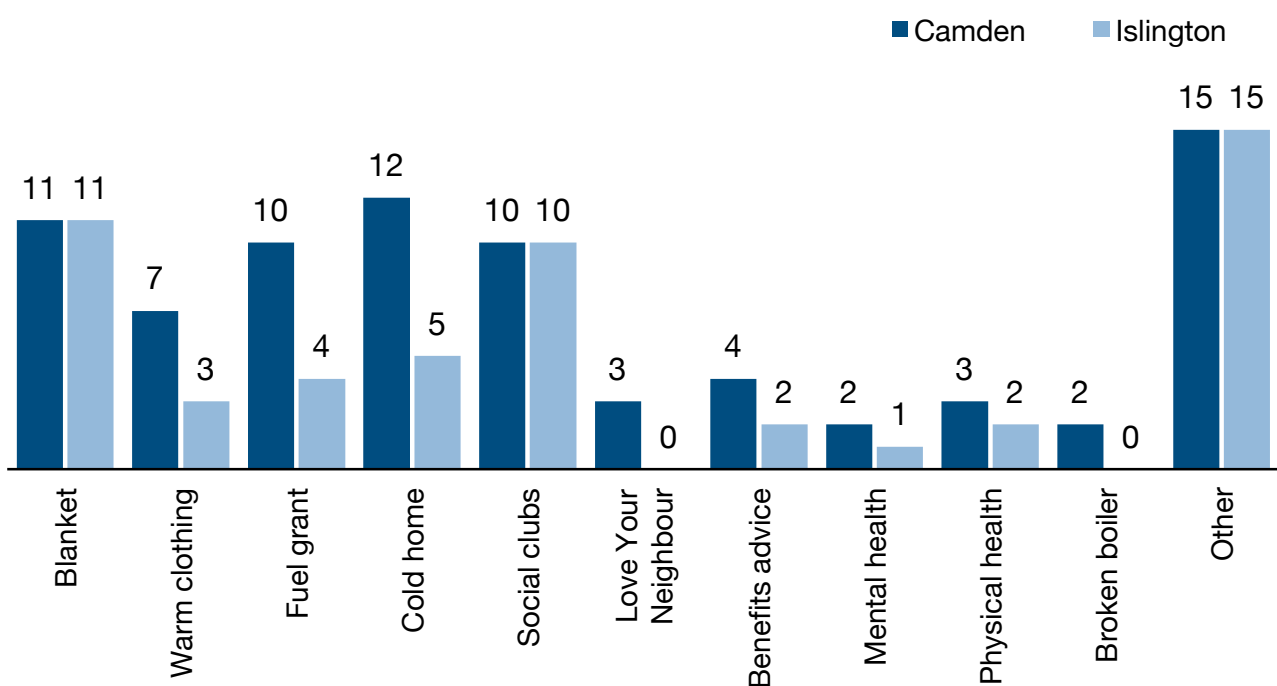
Re-engagement led to 42 older neighbours receiving interventions to keep them warm or to connect them to local services. This combined with referrals from community partners and incoming phone calls from people seeing a Winter Wellbeing flyer or poster led to 38% of the total number of interventions made throughout the project.

"Thank you very much – that will be a big relief for me with this cold weather."

Alfred, 69, Kilburn

In March, extreme weather conditions hit, with "the Beast from the East" and Storm Emma bringing snow and icy temperatures in tow. Knowing people's circumstances can change rapidly in those conditions, we felt re-engagement should become a priority at such a risky time and within two days we were able to call 80 older neighbours. Of those people, we were able to leave messages with or have conversations with 56 neighbours – with 17 asking for further help.

Interventions through re-engagement and other activities



4.5. Types of interventions

	Camden	Islington	Both
Social clubs	45	53	98 (27%)
Blanket	27	30	57 (15%)
Thermal socks/gloves	19	18	37 (10%)
Cold home / energy advice	19	15	34 (9%)
Fuel grant	15	14	29 (8%)
Help with benefits	10	5	15 (4%)
Love Your Neighbour	12	2	14 (4%)
Physical health	11	3	14 (4%)
Other social activities/classes	6	7	13 (3.5%)
Repairs/gardening/decorating	6	5	11 (3%)
Accessible transport	5	2	7 (2%)
Mental health	4	3	7 (2%)
Furniture	2	5	7 (2%)
Legal advice	3	2	5 (1.5%)
Home accessibility	2	2	4 (1%)
Technology	2	2	4 (1%)
Coat/warm clothing	3	1	4 (1%)
Broken boiler	2	1	3 (>1%)
Homecare	3	0	3 (>1%)
Neighbour related	2	0	2 (>1%)
Total	198 (53%)	170 (47%)	368

Through our survey we found that the offer of warm items and financial help was the most valued aspect of project – the biggest impact coming from the small grants distributed. Due to our partnership with London Catalyst and with money raised by our challenge fundraisers and through The Big Give, we were able to offer financial support of up to £100 to 29 older neighbours facing urgent and difficult circumstances. Grants were used to pay large fuel bills, top up gas meters and buy warm items of clothing to enable people to leave their homes. Amy⁴ from Chalk Farm, whose small grant helped her to buy a winter duvet, told us that she had previously been using

⁴ Name changed for privacy

towels as bedding. And for some older neighbours, receiving a grant meant that they didn't have to choose between keeping warm and having food to eat.

Making people feel better connected to the community is a core part Winter Wellbeing and North London Cares' year-round work. Over the winter we were able to personally invite 98 older neighbours to our free social clubs and keep them updated with an events programme every month. The results of this are visible in the significant increase of new people who attended one of 104 social clubs hosted during the project. 14 older neighbours were referred to our Love Your programme after expressing feelings of loneliness and a need for more company at home, with one already matched with a younger neighbour.

We referred 55 people to Camden and Islington's WISH+ and SHINE services to ease anxiety caused by benefit concerns, housing issues, mental and physical health worries and cold homes. Through WISH+ and SHINE older neighbours had referrals made to adult social care, the income triage service, Groundwork London and Age UK. The majority of those 55 older neighbours also received a visit from an Energy Doctor to help advise on energy bills, insulate draughts in their homes and give information on the most efficient use of their boilers and heating in order to reduce bills and prevent future emergency situations.

60 older neighbours (27% of people who received an intervention) were referred or signposted to other community services for help with travel and mobility, family concerns, home improvements, social activities, accessing financial support, IT and adult learning classes, mental and physical health, clothing, help with shopping and legal advice. Some of those community services were:

Friends of the Elderly	Calling London	Parkinson's UK
Taxicard	Help on Your Doorstep	RNIB
Dial-a-Ride	Contact the Elderly	AFTAID
London Fire Brigade	Manor Gardens	Musical Moving
GoodGym	Age UK	Alzheimer's Society
The Irish Centre	Ability Net	FCV Dorcas befriending
Mobility North London	Adult Social Services	Citizens Advice

We checked in with 111 older neighbours we had met in previous years, reminding people that there is still a community looking out for them and available for support if needed. We also distributed over 3,000 leaflets and posters, personally handing 1,470 of those leaflets directly to

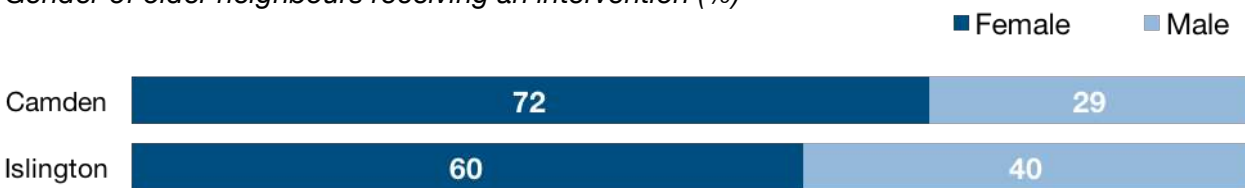
older neighbours – giving them contact details and information to refer to if their circumstances were to change.

4.6 Demographics

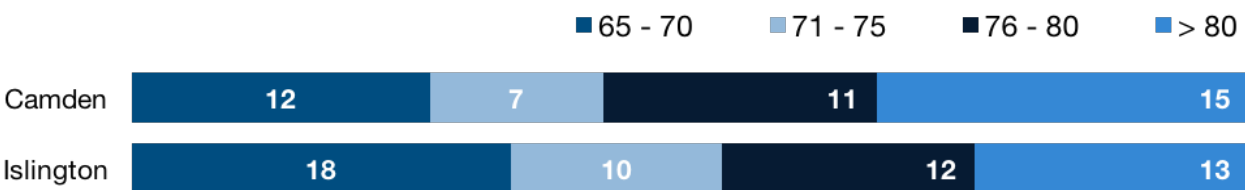
Gender of all older neighbours reached (%)



Gender of older neighbours receiving an intervention (%)



Age of older neighbours (sample of data as not all ages are known)



4.7. Case studies ⁵

“You’ve inspired me to no end – I’ll let you know how the club goes!”

Fred, 66, Archway

Fred called North London Cares after seeing our Winter Wellbeing advert in the Partner’s Gazette – he had recently moved house and had encountered unexpected costs. His new undecorated flat felt stark and very cold, and this made recovering from a recent flu difficult. Fred received a blanket to help him keep warm and a fuel grant in order to buy a fan heater and a duvet. While chatting to Fred he told us that he spends a lot of time in front of the television and as he no longer drinks alcohol, he felt quite out of place in the pubs he used to socialise in. We told him about our Social Clubs programme and two days later Fred attended our Gizmos and Gadgets club, where he met many of his younger and older neighbours and picked up some tech tips at the same time. Fred now knows that there are plenty of opportunities for him to socialise, and we email our social clubs programme to him every month.

“Having someone to talk to was nice. If you don’t get to get out and meet people, it’s nice to be visited by someone, to sit down and have a chat and a bit of a laugh.”

Rose, 72, Finsbury Park

We met Rose through door knocking. Rose told us she spends most of her time indoors and lives alone – most of her family live outside of London and she has very few friends. She also told us that she isn’t as mobile as she used to be and is waiting for an operation. Rose’s health was suffering as a result of the cold spell and she was spending around £40-£50 a week on fuel costs to keep warm. We gave Rose a small grant in order to ease the pressure and she is now considering joining our Love Your Neighbour programme as she enjoyed having someone to talk to during our visit.

“Thank you very much for your help, I was able to buy a curtain with the grant and stop the draft coming in. I also had a man visit me and fill in all the drafts coming from the windows.”

Jenny, 87, Camden Town

⁵ Names have been changed to respect the individuals’ privacy

Jenny heard about Winter Wellbeing from us when we visited a lunch club held at Marchmont Community Centre. She told us that she lives alone in a house that is extremely draughty and cold. Jenny's landlord refuses to make any adjustments to the house or install any form of central heating; the gas fire she does have is on most of the time and is very expensive to run. We were able to help Jenny with a small grant and make a referral on her behalf to WISH+, who later arranged a visit from an Energy Doctor. She feels the situation has improved a great deal and she is now much warmer and more comfortable in her home.

"People like me wouldn't even know about this kind of thing."

Eva, 79, Crouch Hill

There was no answer when we first knocked on Eva's door so we posted a flyer through her letterbox. Eva had received a Winter Wellbeing leaflet during last year's project but isn't keen on asking for charity. However, she decided to give us a call this time to find out more. During the phone call Eva told us she finds it very difficult to move, so doesn't answer her door unless she is expecting someone. Her house was cold and she was interested in receiving a blanket, so we arranged a time to deliver it and offered to stay for a little while to talk a bit more about Winter Wellbeing. We had a great chat with Eva during our visit and eventually she told us that she was currently spending over £40 a week on gas and electric to keep warm. Due to her mobility issues she spends a lot of time in the same chair. The chair had become damaged and uncomfortable over the years and this was causing Eva some distress. We were able to offer Eva a small grant to assist with the large gas bill, and we are currently helping her to apply for a Friends of the Elderly furniture grant to help her buy a new armchair.

"The blanket is great! I use it every night. You're doing a fine job!"

Paul, 87, Highgate

We met Paul through door knocking. He is partially sighted and has difficulty moving around his home. However, when we arrived he was already at his front door and kindly invited us in to talk. Paul told us that he has heart problems and was very concerned that he had lost an important appointment letter from Whittington Hospital. We were able to get in touch with the hospital to inform them of Paul's concerns and a call was made to inform him of his appointment date. During our visit we also offered him a blanket and some thermal non-slip socks, as his home wasn't carpeted and he was keeping his shoes on to avoid the chill.



5. Evaluation

5.1. Project strengths

"I am quite isolated. I have some friends, but in the 14 years I've lived in this flat, I've had about 10 visitors."

Alan, 67, Highgate

As with previous years, our **door knocking activities** have had a pivotal role in meeting older neighbours in the boroughs. It has continued to be one of our most powerful outreach activities with 38 out of the 40 people we surveyed agreeing that it should continue to be part of future Winter Wellbeing projects. This year, we tested new ways of planning our door knocking routes by creating layered Goggle Maps and highlighting nearby community spaces. This made the project more time efficient, as we were able to quickly follow up with interventions and maximise our presence in door knocking areas by hosting community outreach nearby. Having a lower number of addresses to visit also meant that we were able to dedicate more time to each person we met, which opened doors to deeper conversations, multiple interventions and lasting connections.

Contrary to previous years, door knocking has worked alongside other outreach activities rather than dominated the project. We put a more concentrated effort into **community engagement and innovative outreach this year** – resulting in a broad range of interactions and intervention types. We also looked for innovative ways to meet more older neighbours and hosted pop-up coffee mornings in libraries, encouraged Plus Bus and Dial-a-Ride drivers to leave flyers on seats, delivered flyers and posters to food banks and charity shops, and created slideshows to display on the screens in GP waiting rooms and pharmacies.

Our **re-engagement efforts** had an excellent response, and although this was only a small part of the project delivery it was the source of 41 deeper interventions. We were able to react quickly to the snow and sudden cold spell in March by prioritising re-engagement calls and checking in.

Targeting one borough at a time (Camden first and Islington from January), having a full time Outreach Officer to support our Outreach Coordinator and making more time for planning in September all contributed to the **smooth delivery of the project**. Receiving the door knocking data from the councils earlier this year meant that we were able to map out routes and allocate days quickly, which allowed us to prioritise people who had expressed an urgent need after receiving the introductory letter.

Our **ability to adapt and tailor interventions to meet specific needs** was also a developed strength this year. This was especially true when delivering small grants. It was often the case that those in desperate need of a small grant did not have a bank account and so we were unable to issue a cheque. We found alternative ways to offer financial support, usually in the form of a voucher to cover the cost of food, duvets or other warming items – leaving people with some of their pension or pension credit free to pay large energy bills.

One of the key strengths of Winter Wellbeing is that, after seven years, it is now recognised and remembered, with a number of people we met through door knocking recalling an intervention they had received in previous years. Although our targets and approach have all adapted to the lessons we've learned over time, the core objectives of the project are the same and the consistency of its delivery has helped us to establish a trusted role within the community. It just takes a spell of cold weather, a fall or a bereavement to change a person's circumstances instantly and increase their level of loneliness and social isolation. Winter Wellbeing helps to establish North London Cares as a network that can offer support before and during those difficult times.

“My mum gets so cold in winter. I try but I can't do everything alone. It's such a great feeling to know there is someone out there looking out for my mum too.”

Daughter of Maria, 87, Camden



5.2. Challenges

As with any work that aims to improve the wellbeing of others, there is an emotive element of the project that can be particularly challenging for all involved. This is especially true of door knocking outreach. One of the strengths of this year's project is the time we had to spend with people that we met at their doors. We were often invited into people's homes to talk, and while this helped us to establish more meaningful connections, on occasion it exposed staff to quite challenging situations. In some cases the older neighbours we met were dealing with complex or life limiting illness, severe depression or living in extreme poverty and were already connected to local services who were supporting them. In these instances we were not able to offer any additional support.

Even with fewer targeted doors to knock this year, the time spent on planning and delivering this part of the project was still dominant – with the addresses being more geographically spread to allow us to cover more areas. This was challenging as only 24% of people visited answered the door, with 8% resulting in an intervention. Around one in 10 addresses we visited had a key safe box, which indicated some difficulty in getting to the door independently. On some occasions we were able to speak to carers or relatives and coordinate interventions with them. However, in

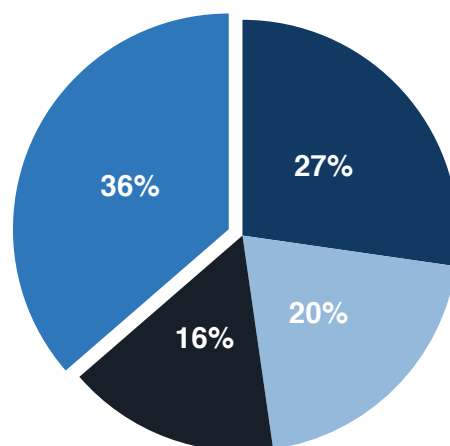
most cases we were resigned to posting a leaflet and follow up letter, with no other way to get in touch with that person.

There was often a reluctance to take the offer of help for reasons such as not wanting neighbours to hear their problems, the stigma attached to “taking charity”, distrust or lack of confidence in local services, or (often in the case of small grants) not wanting to be seen as a burden or to be taking something that might be needed elsewhere. We often found that people were aware of services available to them but were hesitant to seek that help; meeting a friendly face and having someone speak to them informally gave more of an incentive to explore these services.

5.3. Survey results

“In your opinion, what is the most valuable aspect of the Winter Wellbeing project?”

- Reassurance that someone is looking out for me
- Finding out about social clubs and Love Your Neighbour
- Referrals or signposting to other local services
- The offer of warm items or financial help



In March we conducted a survey with 40 randomly selected older neighbours who had received an intervention through this year’s project (20 from Camden, 20 from Islington). Although this is a small selection of the people engaged in the project, it offered important insight into its strengths and challenges, and gave us the opportunity to hear feedback and suggestions for future use. For example:

- 18 out of the 40 people surveyed felt that their original concerns were now improved or resolved as a result of the intervention they received;
- 7 people felt that the project had improved their health and wellbeing;
- 4 people saw improvements in their housing issues;
- 9 people said their financial issues had improved;
- 10 people felt better connected after receiving an intervention;
- 8 people felt their issues were more complicated than the support available could allow for;

- 5 felt that the service/intervention was too minor or did not fully resolve their issue;
- 5 had yet to access the service yet;
- 95% of the people surveyed felt that door knocking should continue to be part of Winter Wellbeing.

The survey highlights the opportunity to develop new ways of supporting people with complicated needs and to continue to establish relationships with a wide range of community partners and services. All five of the people who had not accessed the service had yet to attend a social club and had been deterred by the cold; however, they now receive a monthly events programme from North London Cares and may be encouraged to attend activities in future.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Door knocking

There is still much value in door knocking and it often leads us to the most isolated older neighbours in the boroughs. More can be done to enable us to speak to those older neighbours who aren't able to make it to their door – possibly combining door knocks with phone calls from the start of the project to cover more ground.

The introductory letter should be simplified and continue to include the Winter Wellbeing flyer, which we did this year for the first time to raise awareness of the project early. There could be room to send additional letters to more people but with a request to call if they'd like to receive a visit, rather than calling to opt out. In this case a combination of phone calls, door knocks and requested visits could be used to ease the pressure of trying to knock on so many doors. For example, 3,000 initial letters could be sent to introduce the project, inform people that a phone call or door knock may happen in the coming months, and offer the chance to specifically request a visit or opt out completely. This would allow us to reach a larger number of older neighbours in the first instance, to identify people in urgent need (through incoming calls), to plan visits and set appointments with older neighbours so that they can inform us of any difficulty getting to the door, and to visit people with information prepared in advance.

Door knocking should be conducted in pairs, by members of staff. Going into a person's home when invited is the best way to get the most out of each interaction and is in keeping with the project message of keeping warm (rather than letting heat out by talking to people on doorsteps).

This can often lead to emotive and/or challenging conversations so additional mental health, resilience and/or MECC training⁶ (or re-training) would be advised prior to the start of the project.

6.2. Community outreach

The extra focus put into community outreach this year proved that it can have just as much impact as door knocking when given enough time. We should continue to find innovative ways of working in and with the community, and to utilise North London Cares' network of volunteers. Community outreach can also be used as a way of engaging people who are reluctant to seek help or support, or to encourage family, friends and other people to refer older neighbours to us. Ideas and suggestions for future projects are to:

- Pull together volunteers to distribute posters and flyers across whole estates and blocks;
- Continue building relationships with key services or professionals such as Dial-a-Ride, Plus Bus, Taxi Card, NHS care coordinators, sheltered housing unit managers, estate care takers, Citizens Advice volunteer, charity shops, pub managers and food banks;
- Organise live signposting events in libraries or community centres and invite local services to come along and directly speak to people;
- Host “no questions asked” free group meals in areas with a high percentage of older social housing tenants. Placing emphasis on the social element of the event but with a Winter Wellbeing message by having blankets available and sharing information about the project.

6.3. Re-engagement

In future years, we should also allow for more time to plan and deliver re-engagement work as this builds upon the connections made during this project and previous years' projects. Re-engagement should become a key objective of the Winter Wellbeing project in future rather than an addition, and should be made a priority in extreme weather in particular.

Phone calls are also a very successful way of re-introducing the project and North London Cares. Regular time should be scheduled to include these phone calls weekly or fortnightly.

⁶ <http://www.makeeverycontactcount.co.uk/training/>

6.4. Innovative interventions

While blankets, warm clothing and small grants have all been well received this year, there is room to think more creatively around the ways we offer interventions in future. Some suggestions are:

- Offer hot water bottles, hats and/or scarves as alternatives to blankets;
- Be clear in communicating how small grants can help, or offer alternatives – for example help to buy a winter coat or a duvet, or help to block draughts in people's homes;
- Create a food grant alternative with vouchers to a supermarket – promoting the health aspect of the project and allowing people's pension and pension credit to cover bills. This will also avoid ostracising people who may not have bank accounts;
- Combine food grants with offering volunteers to help get the shopping – particularly helping with online ordering where mobility is an issue. We could also work with community partners like Friends of the Elderly who provide tech grants;
- Work with food banks to issue vouchers;
- Create Winter Wellbeing recipes or information cards that will boost people's immune systems and help fight colds and flu.

6.6. Year-round planning

In future years, planning for Winter Wellbeing should start even earlier and summer events should be used as an opportunity to build connections and visit new potential outreach areas. It is vital to develop relationships with key services or groups throughout the year and, where suitable, involve them in the planning for Winter Wellbeing. Flu Jab clinics started as early as September last year so establishing contacts with local surgeries sooner should help secure more spots. It could also be beneficial to develop ways to involve volunteers more and possibly advertise for specific voluntary roles – for example community champions and leaflet distributors) in August and September.

7. Conclusion

This year's Winter Wellbeing project has offered us more insight than ever into the importance of an informal approach, a varied and adaptable outreach strategy and the opportunity for creativity in future projects.

We often found that the older neighbours we met during outreach were aware of some of the services available to them, and it was encouraging to see information from other organisations, as well as our own Winter Wellbeing flyers, pinned to fridges and on coffee tables. However, there is still a reluctance to access some services due to people not wanting to feel dependent or old, not fully understanding how these services might help and often mistrusting or being sceptical about their effectiveness. Winter Wellbeing offers older neighbours in Camden and Islington a friendly face and informal discussion about the types of support available, as well as help to access that support through referrals on their behalf. It has become an essential tool in helping people to access support they may otherwise have missed.

“If you hadn’t knocked on my door that day, I wouldn’t know about these services. That was the first time someone came to my door like that and helped me.”

Tina, 68, Kentish Town

This year’s project has taught us the value in broadening our outreach activities. Door knocking continues to introduce us to some of the most isolated older neighbours in most need in the boroughs. But we cannot assume that this is the only way to meet people needing assistance. For people experiencing fuel poverty, visiting a local library or lunch club at a community centre may be cheaper than trying to keep warm at home. It was often the case that the older neighbours we met through community outreach were more reluctant to accept the support on offer, concerned that being physically able makes their problem less urgent than others’. This demonstrates the need of a continued effort to vary the types of outreach we deliver, to ensure that we are meeting a broad range of people and communicating an inclusive message, and that we can place more emphasis on preventative measures.

One of the strengths of this year’s project has been re-engagement. We spoke to a number of older neighbours who recognised Winter Wellbeing or remembered the interventions they received in previous years – a few continue to use the blankets they were given two years ago. The feeling of being checked in on and supported by someone in the community was greatly appreciated, and it was often the case that people’s circumstances had changed and they now needed a different form of intervention. This has not only shown us the importance of incorporating re-engagement in to the project, but also the opportunity for innovation in future. Our survey indicated the need to develop ways to support complex issues – so it’s time to review the support we can offer and create new opportunities to deliver it. The overall objective of helping older neighbours to stay warm, active, healthy and connected should stay consistent, but the ways of delivering this should continue to be fresh and engaging in future years.

For seven years Winter Wellbeing has gone from strength to strength, continuing to adapt and evolve to best meet the needs of older neighbours in Camden and Islington. During the six months of intense outreach activities, we were able to speak to hundreds of people – gaining a snapshot of their lives, their interests and struggles in a small but valuable amount of time. This year Winter Wellbeing has helped over 200 older neighbours stay warm in their homes, connect to local activities and services, seek support for their physical and mental health and access financial support during the most difficult of circumstances, including during two prolonged cold snaps during which snow covered Camden and Islington. For many, our knock at the door led to the first conversation they had had with someone in several days.

Loneliness and isolation continue to be endemic problems in our city, with between five and 15% of older people reporting that they are often or always lonely.⁷ Through Winter Wellbeing, North London Cares is able to provide a pro-active response to this, by offering a simple chat, or a helping hand from a friendly face. While older people still face significantly increased health and social risks during winter, it is evident that there is a need to continue developing and delivering the project – ensuring older neighbours feel looked out for in the years to come.

“We all need to think about our families, neighbours and wider communities, and consider who may be feeling lonely. What can we do to reach out and help others feel connected – maybe it’s as simple as letting people know we are ‘happy to chat’?”

Jo Cox Loneliness Commission⁸



⁷ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf

⁸ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf