

Highfield Co-op (Bradford district) - Mental Health Film and Conversations Project

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	July 2021
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Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project

There are vulnerable communities within the Bradford district who may not be aware of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, such as refugees, low income families, elderly and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. This project is aimed at people with mental health issues within the community who may struggle to understand fuel poverty and the dangers of CO. Many refugees arriving in the United Kingdom face multiple health challenges. Some refugees' health issues result from experiences in their home countries, others may develop once they arrive. Because refugees generally live in low-income housing, one concern can be the impact on health (physical and mental) from living in poor housing (cold/damp homes) which can increase the risk of fuel poverty. Even when living in safe housing however, refugees who lack experience with western-style homes and are from different cultural backgrounds, may be at greater risk than native residents. In addition, limited English and literacy skills may prevent some refugee families from learning how to safely use and maintain their new homes. This has the potential to lead to the risk of CO poisoning from appliances, if the families are unsure of how to safely maintain these and may be unaware of the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning. There is a big gap in knowledge within these different cultures, especially around heating and cooking, in terms of CO awareness. In terms of fuel poverty, they are unlikely to be aware of the impact of fuel poverty and what can be done to mitigate against it. This will be even more difficult to understand, for those living with mental health challenges.

1.1 The solution

Highfield Co-op aim to work closely with these different cultures and vulnerable communities to raise awareness of CO poisoning, including the signs and symptoms and to provide advice around energy saving and fuel poverty. Highfield Co-op will show films at various venues within the Bradford district, to help those with mental health challenges, to understand the dangers of CO and to support them in accessing information around energy saving tips and ideas. The films will help to start conversations around fuel poverty and CO and to find solutions in how to deal with fuel poverty for people with mental health needs. Highfield Co-op have access to these groups and are a trusted intermediary within the community, who can reach those who could potentially fall through the gaps. They operate at grass roots level and are therefore able to access ambassadors and key contacts within these diverse and hard to reach groups.

2. Scope and Objectives

The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.

2.1 Shared Purpose

This project aims to deliver clear and effective messaging around the risks of CO poisoning, including signs and symptoms, by showing films at various community events within Bradford, around fuel poverty and CO awareness.

2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Provide key safety and energy information via films to those living with mental health challenges
- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness sessions to vulnerable customers
- Provide advice around energy saving
- Start conversations around fuel poverty and the dangers of CO, to find solutions on how to deal with these issues, for people with mental health needs

2.3 Scope

- 7 volunteers to be engaged
- 3 events with 120 people attending, across venues within Bradford
- The geographical area of Bradford

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA Project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria. This is a requirement

This project qualifies under the criteria for the VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable customers from different cultural backgrounds, who may not be aware of the dangers of CO, nor fuel poverty and are living with mental health challenges. Some people will have recently arrived from war torn countries as refugees and have serious mental health concerns. There is a significant gap in knowledge within refugee and other culturally diverse communities, around the dangers of CO poisoning and energy usage in general. CO awareness sessions will be delivered as part of the project outputs. This project seeks to take advantage of a unique opportunity, to provide important and potentially life-saving information, to vulnerable customers who are difficult to reach and living with mental health problems. As the project has a mental health vulnerability theme, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy, as does the fuel poverty / energy saving element, which will ultimately result in financial savings.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- As this project is around CO awareness and reducing the risk of harm caused by CO, it aligns with the eligibility criteria. The project also supports NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the mental health and financial vulnerability themes (fuel poverty)
- The challenges around language barriers and communication in the Bradford area, also aligns with the physical vulnerability theme
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI for customers

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers.

Within the Northern Gas Networks region, we serve 2.7 million gas-using households. The socio-economic characteristics of our region mean that we operate in many communities that are amongst the most economically deprived in the whole country. This was a key factor in our prioritising engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of customers, telling them about our services, about what we do and how we could improve. Each year, we undertake analysis of all the insight we've heard in the previous year to prioritise those issues our stakeholders most want to engage on. Over the past 12-18 months, we've done this in a number of ways.

4.1 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2019 – 2020

Asking our stakeholders what's important – using our wide range of engagement mechanisms from strategic workshops to customer perceptions, we asked stakeholders to prioritise what is most important to them (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations.

During a CV-19 specific workshop in August 2020, our stakeholders identified that there was an increase in debt/money management issues, specifically with those people who were 'Just About Managing', due to the current pandemic. They said larger energy bills and being at home was giving cause for concern, especially during winter. The demand for information regarding benefits increased, as a result of low incomes and redundancies. This is further compounded when there are cultural differences to also consider, due to alternative ways of heating and cooking. Many people have also been furloughed, which has created significant financial challenges and mental health problems. As a consequence, maintaining and repairing/replacing appliances is not a priority for these groups, therefore significantly increasing the risk of CO poisoning. Stakeholders said there needs to be more focus on CO awareness, so customers understand the risks posed by not having appliances repaired or serviced. Refugee communities are likely to be on low incomes and potentially living in fuel poverty and as a consequence, due to lack of support, there is a significant gap in their knowledge around CO. The challenge around language barriers and additional mental health concerns, makes it even more difficult to reach these culturally diverse groups.

Our stakeholders also told us some of the other significant impacts of the pandemic have been associated with debt, isolation, anxiety and other mental health issues. This project will help address those and similar issues, associated with living in fuel poverty and being on a low income.

In January 2021 we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said it would be good for NGN to us partners to promote the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES). They also said that fuel, food and general poverty are all linked, and we need more streamlined ways of working together and partners can help raise awareness through different

methods. This project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty and associated CO safety issues, to enable them to gain the knowledge and understanding of how to manage their energy bills, tackle fuel poverty and stay safe.

In our wider stakeholder engagement programme, we have also heard very strongly, how safety is at the forefront of stakeholders' minds. Stakeholders see a strong correlation between safety and our social obligations and have told us that it is essential that we continue to raise awareness of carbon monoxide, because doing so saves lives.

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations. Checking we've got it right – using a range of engagement mechanisms to assess and challenge our response to stakeholder feedback, ensuring we are responding in the right way. This has offered us robust challenges into how we deal with customers in vulnerable situations which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.3 Social Indicator Mapping, Covid 19 Research and Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)

Academic research social indicator mapping took place in 2019 and further research around CV-19 impact was undertaken in July 2020. This was shared as part of our stakeholder engagement. A new VMT has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The system allows you to add multiple factors of vulnerability together to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. All data can be mixed and matched to answer complicated questions, e.g. see where there are a high number of older people living in low energy efficient housing and in fuel poverty. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that there are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits in this area. This research also indicated that over 365,000 (12.8%) people experience fuel poverty in the NGN area, 31,706 of which are from the Bradford area. Bradford also had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN.

Specifically, in relation to this project, Highfield Co-op are bespoke to the region of Bradford/Keighley. This community group has extensive reach into those customers living in social isolation, those customers who are in fuel poverty and those in desperate need of support with mental health issues such as refugee communities. This area also has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language and therefore high prevalence of diverse groups with many cultural differences. Highfield Co-op are a specialist organisation, operating within one of the most deprived areas of our network and have key links into partner organisation such as UNESCO City of Film, who will help deliver these key messages via films.

Recent CO research undertaken by NGN found that increasing awareness of the dangers of CO was a priority in Bradford and social indicator mapping research, also indicated that Bradford had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN. More recently, NGN commissioned some CO research which highlighted that only 32% of respondents in Bradford recognise that CO can kill you and 20% of respondents rate their awareness of CO as 5 out of 10 or lower. 34% of respondents did not feel

their awareness had increased over the past few years. 33% of the people who responded in Bradford did not have a CO alarm in their home and only 29% of respondents test their alarm annually. From the same research, the number of respondents who have a disc which changes colour when CO is present is highest in Bradford. The concern here is that a disc is no longer a recommended option. It is clear that this project should have a positive effect on raising awareness around CO in the Bradford area.

4.4 Vulnerability Strategy AAA Framework

Within our vulnerability strategy we have developed, with the help of our stakeholders, the 'AAA' framework. This helps us support our customers in vulnerable situations. Awareness, Accessibility and Action. By adapting this principles-based approach into our AAA framework, we will ensure that all customers are treated fairly and consistently. The themes of mental and financial vulnerability within the project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.

5.1 Outcomes

- 2.5 hours per event
- 7 Volunteers
- Advice on energy issues and CO awareness will be provided
- 3 events with 120 people attending

5.2 Success criteria

- All vulnerable customers referred will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety and the dangers associated with Carbon Monoxide via the CO awareness survey
- Customers will also have an awareness of how to save energy
- Evaluation and collecting data about how many people attend the film events
- Evidence of how we have supported people in tackling the barriers which are identified.

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project will have several stakeholders involved within the Bradford district such as UNESCO City of Film, All Saints Church (KLY), Sangat Centre (KLY, Kirkgate Centre (Shipley) and Lidget Green Healthy Living Centre (Bradford).

7. Potential for new learning

Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

The learning which will arise from this project, will be understanding the needs of people with mental health issues in relation to accessing information on the dangers of CO. Working with various mental health charities to understand how information and energy saving and knowledge can be given to people with mental health needs. Using film as a way of starting conversations, understanding what barriers people with mental health needs face when accessing information and understanding how to save energy. Any learning will be shared with other mental health groups within NGN's footprint area.

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it should provide the SROI calculation.

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date

Detail start and end date of the VCMA Project and, where relevant, the VCMA Project that preceded this initiative.

1st June 2021 – 31st March 2023

Geographic area

Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.

This project will take place in Bradford and surrounding area.

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director