

Hull and East Yorkshire Children's University (HEY CU) Reading Van – bringing reading to the community

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2024
Project contact name:	Laura Ratcliffe
Project contact number/email:	lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk
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

The problem the project will solve: Letter Box Coordinators from HEY CU deliver one to one reading sessions to children in care*(CIC) in schools. Often schools don't have a suitable space for them to work in and they find themselves in hallways, or shared spaces where there are lots of distractions and noise. This issue is especially prevalent in rural schools in the area, which are overcrowded and small. This impacts the effectiveness of the sessions, slowing down the children's progress. Children in care are the most vulnerable group of children in society. Without interventions like the Letter Box Club CIC children's long-term life outcomes are very poor, with many of them entering the criminal justice system or ending up unemployed. A high proportion of adults from care backgrounds have mental health issues. With programmes like this we are able to tackle this problem. Ensuring that children in care fulfil their potential and have positive futures.

1.1 The solution

The introduction of a HEY CU reading van that the coordinators will take to rural schools in the area, to run one to one reading sessions. A Vintage VW van is ideal because it has glass windows all around for visibility and can navigate very narrow roads and small parking areas, the size is ideal. Sessions will be recorded for the health and safety of the child and coordinator, with the consent of the carer. The intention is that in a few years' time when hydrogen fuel stations are available in the East Riding, the vehicle could be converted to use hydrogen. An integral part of the programme will be to incorporate CO safety messages into these sessions, working in partnership with NGN on delivery of these.

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

NGN and HEY CU want to improve literacy, employability and combat rural isolation. By working together to improve vulnerable children's literacy and wellbeing, their chances of a successful life and career are increased, therefore breaking the cycle of fuel poverty. Children who are literate and have a positive self-image and aspirations for the future, help to facilitate building a resilient local community. The van also addresses the issue of rural isolation, as the children who will be supported by the intervention, live in some of the most isolated areas of the East Riding.

2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve literacy, employability and combat rural isolation
- Increase the children's chances of a successful life and career, therefore breaking the cycle of fuel poverty
- Provide one on one reading sessions
- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness sessions with schools

2.3 Scope

- Project will be ongoing
- The reading van will visit 25 schools twice a month
- Allowing 40 hours of learning a month to take place amounting to 480 hours a year
- The programme can still be continued during holidays because of having the mobile bus to facilitate the sessions
- The geographical areas of East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston Upon Hull
- Children on the programme are assessed every six months, so we will expect to see an acceleration in their reading attainment
- Children and teachers/schools will complete evaluations on the programme and use the reading van as the space for learning
- Increased awareness of carbon monoxide (CO)

2.4 Additional support services

- 100% carbon monoxide (CO) awareness sessions

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 children in vulnerable situations, in particular rural isolation and aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. CO sessions will also be delivered as part of the project outputs. This project will equip children to be able to address any future potential mental health issues which is another element of NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. As the project has an education theme, it also aligns with NGN'S Social Mobility Pledge Opportunity Action Plan.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project will have a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the rurality and mental health themes
- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

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. This includes digital engagement in light of CV-19. During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of CIVS. In our July 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed new emerging issues under Social Mobility due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with mental health issues, home-schooling challenges, and child safeguarding. In the workshop held in August 2020 our stakeholders also identified that education was an issue due to the pandemic. They stated that an education gap has grown for disadvantaged children. Some vulnerable children will have received no education during lockdown due to lack of access to services/internet/technology. This has therefore impacted social, literacy skills and development skills.

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support CIVS. 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 CIVS which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.3 Social Indicator Mapping & Covid 19 Research – including a Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)

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 vulnerability mapping tool has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The VMT 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. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues. Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that East Riding has areas of deprivation and unemployment.

4.4 Social Mobility Pledge / Opportunity Action Plan

NGN has partnered with the Right Honourable Justine Greening to develop an Opportunity Action Plan as part of the Social Mobility Pledge. The challenges in many communities around deprivation have become deeper and more pronounced due to Covid-19. Boosting social mobility is not only about creating opportunities for people from all backgrounds, it removes barriers too. Our Opportunity Action Plan will enable us to go further in increasing opportunities and support in local communities. The Action Plan addresses the fact that East Riding is one of the areas facing challenges in terms of social mobility, therefore NGN are prioritising that area for support around education/literacy, which is another reason why this project has been awarded.

Specifically, in relation to the Reading Van project, stakeholders asked us to prioritise working more with schools as they were identified as an important conduit to highlighting children in vulnerable situations. This project also aligns with NGN's Social Mobility Pledge Opportunity Action Plan and in particular, the 'cold spots' facing challenges around social mobility i.e. Hull and East Riding area.

In our wider stakeholder engagement programme, we have 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.

4.5 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 rurality and mental health as part of this project align to NGN's 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

- 75 children on the programme in Hull and the East Riding
- The reading van will visit 25 schools twice a month
- Allowing 40 hours of learning a month to take
- Amounting to 480 hours a year
- Plan to deliver carbon monoxide awareness sessions to 2000 children

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
- Safety Seymour sessions will take place in schools
- Children on the programme are assessed every six months so we will expect to see an acceleration in their reading attainment.
- HEY CU will keep track of the number of sessions delivered in the van/outside the van and will report these back to NGN
- Each time a child has a session they will be able to choose a book to take home
- Approximately 600 books will be given to children in care over the course of the year

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

The project partners involved are the schools where the bus will be visiting bi-weekly for reading sessions to take place and the schools where CO awareness sessions will take place.

7. Potential for new learning

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

If the project is successful there is the possibility to scale up and have more vans serving more areas and beneficiaries across the whole network

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.

HEY CU have made their own Social Value assessment based on approximately 600 books that will be given to children in care over the course of the year. They have assumed the average value of each book is £10 based on amazon search and the social value of this book to disadvantaged children is much greater. 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 April 2021 – 31st March 2024

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.

The East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston Upon Hull

Approved by

Eileen Brown

Customer Experience Director