

Centre for Warmth – Redcar Baptist Church

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)

Redcar is a medium sized coastal town in the North East of England. Of its 6 wards, Redcar has 4 that sit within the bottom decile on the government's indexes for multiple deprivation map. The needs in the town are complex and wide ranging, this combined with the limited resources and few charitable organisations operating in the town mean there is a huge gap to fill in relation to support requirements.

Headline data relating to the makeup of our town include it having:

- One of the fastest aging populations, with young people growing up and moving out of the town to find work opportunities that simply don't exist locally.
- One of the highest rates for suicide in the country per head of population.
- Up until 2020 there was very little in the way of ethnic diversity since that time Redcar has been earmarked as a location for housing those seeking asylum and refuge in the UK. The town has been utterly unprepared for this and so those asylum seekers and refugees coming to Redcar from often traumatic situations, have been relatively unsupported.
- Research carried out for the 'End Child Poverty Coalition' in 2021 shows that the North-East has had the steepest increase in child poverty in the UK with 40% of children in Redcar and Cleveland classed as 'growing up poor'.

Being a small town with such a breadth of poverty presents its own unique challenges. The overall population is relatively low compared to a larger town or city, but the same diverse features of poverty exist there too. This has resulted in a town with a large range of unaddressed complex needs living side by side with few agencies meeting those needs.

Solution

Redcar Baptist Church, which has existed in the town for 95 years, has applied for VCMA funding to become a Centre for Warmth. Their project's target group is defined by the need on the ground. In an area of high deprivation there is a need to be responsive to evolving, currently unmet needs. At present the most vulnerable people they engage with fit into the following categories:

- Elderly (through isolation common issues of food & fuel poverty go unnoticed & unmet)
- Children (40% of children are classed as "growing up poor" & who through lack of agency suffer with the effects of poverty behind closed doors & who's parents are unaware of the support available to them)
- Asylum seekers (there is a recent rise in asylum seekers in the town with a huge gap in support services for this group. With no recourse to public funds, poor English, trauma and a

lack of cultural understanding on how to safely navigate life in the UK this group is particularly vulnerable.

The Centre for Warmth concept was developed to ensure a holistic approach to supporting fuel poor households within a community setting. Centre users will receive a combination of services such as:

- energy advice
- CO awareness and advice
- income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt
- free or reduced cost food/clothing
- fuel top up vouchers
- connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance

Plus training, information, advice and services bespoke to their individual neighbourhoods. All provided in a warm safe space designed to improve health and wellbeing, increase household income, and help communities better manage their energy.

To embed sustainability, a welcoming atmosphere, to encourage community building and to create a format for moving people into employment they created Common Ground Coffee Shop in the building too. This affordable but artisan coffee shop operates a pay it forward system for those who can't afford food or drink, provides free soup and training opportunities for job seekers. It has become a place that tackles isolation, improves community cohesion and mental health and acts as a warm space and melting pot for the most vulnerable in their community to access the wider support we offer through our courses and clubs.

2. Scope and Objectives

Redcar Baptist Church Centre for Warmth based in Redcar, aims to directly serve 3750 beneficiaries through a range of measures. As a trusted provider within their community they are in an ideal position to deliver this project.

The funding will be used to employ 3 staff. A Centre for Warmth Project Leader, a Children & Families Project Leader and an Asylum Support Project Leader. It aims to provide a safe, warm and welcoming environment 5 days a week for all members of the community to receive advice and support, attend interest groups and access affordable food through their Community Grocery shop moving people from vulnerability to greater independence.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve health and wellbeing of the centre users
- To reduce fuel poverty
- To increase income through benefit maximisation and debt management

- Employ 3 members of staff to cover critical service areas.
- Identify vulnerable families experiencing effects of poverty and offer tailored advice, signposting and referral to improve life outcomes
- Offer 1-1 advocacy support in situations where parents may feel overwhelmed when connecting with other external agencies e.g. schools or social services etc.
- To provide CO awareness and advice
- To increase awareness and registrations of the PSR

2.2 Scope

The main services provided will include:

- Cooking on a budget in a slow cooker with food available from the Community Grocery during that week (with the first 200 participants being given a free slow cooker over 24 months)
- Energy efficiency advice course with a focus on “heating the person and not the room”(with free heat pad for the first 200 participants over 24 months)
- Money Management course
- PSR registration and benefit advice surgery
- Signposting to physical & social activities
- Safeguarding
- Group activities targeted at tackling isolation
- One stop shop’ style drop in service gathering experts and volunteers to offer support in the following areas: Legal, housing, IT & internet access, support opening bank accounts, college sign ups etc.
- English Language lessons
- Weekly ‘orientation sessions’ for new arrivals to the area to help them orientate themselves in the UK
- Create a ‘buddy system’ connecting trusted, vetted volunteers to champion individuals in appointments with schools, doctors, Job Centre, housing teams etc.
- Generate & make connections for volunteer opportunities for asylum seekers to better integrate and prepare for potential work in the UK.
- Signpost to external beneficial services
- Preparing those who receive positive asylum decision for next steps which include instant removal of housing support and need for accommodation/bank accounts etc.
- Weekly free kids club sessions for 5-11yrs to give parents a rest bite but also develop social skills, reduce isolation and introduce children to new opportunities.
- Raise awareness of CO
- Provide hot food and drinks through Common Ground Coffee Shop/café through the winter months through our centre for warmth for vulnerable people.

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support a wide range of vulnerable customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across the Redcar locality, as well as raising awareness of CO and the PSR. As the project has mental wellbeing and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN’S Vulnerability Strategy too.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project has a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the Financial hardship theme and the wider vulnerability categories of:
 - Financial hardship
 - Accessibility, including language
 - Socio-demographic
 - Cultural
 - Mental Wellbeing themes
- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

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

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. Since 2019 we've held regular workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS). This ensures that we are well informed to address the needs of customers across our network and through collaborative projects.

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The energy and cost of living crises have further compounded this issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help to address energy affordability. The project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside, and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- Fuel poverty
- Benefit claims
- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

Our most recent stakeholder engagement during 2023 has informed us that financial hardship is still a key area of focus, alongside the health impacts associated with, or exacerbated by, living in cold and damp homes. Stakeholders also told us that increasing capacity for support within services would be key to addressing the immediate and longer term impacts of fuel poverty and energy affordability. This project addresses this need and ensures additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service.

Each year we use our annual Customer Perceptions Research to understand the priorities of our customers. Amongst a set of general tracker questions i.e., same questions that are asked year on year, the evidence in the most recent research (March 2023), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas. This is a clear indication, as to how concerned customers are about the cost of energy and the subsequent impact this will have on other bills. Customers were also asked to prioritise the list of vulnerabilities listed below:

- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
- Physical challenges
- Financial Hardship

This was the order of priority from the customers surveyed:

- Financial Hardship
- Physical challenges
- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability

Financial hardship continued to be the dimension of vulnerability that most customers prioritised, with more customers in the most recent survey selecting this as their top priority. Physical challenges were second, closely followed by Mental well-being third. Rurality and Temporary vulnerability were ranked fourth and fifth.

Very recent (Autumn 2023) Bespoke Vulnerability Stakeholder Mapping research identified categories of stakeholders that are hard to reach, this included:

- People living with a disability

- Senior citizens with long term conditions
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Mental health

Health conditions which are prevalent in the NGN region are:

- Cancer and chronic kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Respiratory
- Mental health

Through the research carried out, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:

- Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
- Mental wellbeing
- Financial hardship
- Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
- Socio Demographic
- Household composition
- Rural Vulnerability
- Accessibility Including language
- Medical Dependant on Energy
- Cultural

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations (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 customers in vulnerable situations which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.3 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 rural and financial vulnerability within the project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

The Redcar Baptist Centre will employ 3 key workers who will be based in the Centre for Warmth:

1. A Centre for Warmth Project Leader to co-ordinate, develop, oversee and deliver a growing range of courses & clubs that meet the needs of the most vulnerable in their community with a particular focus on isolation amongst the elderly and on raising the profile of CO safety across all projects. This role will be a connecting one, drawing members of the community to courses and clubs and raising awareness of wider community support available to the most vulnerable.
2. An Asylum Support Project Leader to engage with asylum seekers by mobilising existing and new volunteers to create an international hub that champions the needs of those seeking asylum in the UK in Redcar. By creating an international hub within their centre for warmth for asylum seekers they will help those seeking asylum in Redcar to build positive futures by supporting them to gain full access to existing and new support services that they aren't aware of or realistically able to access because of language, cultural or other simple practical barriers.
3. A Children & Families Project Leader to engage with 350 children and adults by establishing a network of support for early years and primary school aged children and their parents/carers to secure better outcomes in one of the country's poorest communities in Redcar. They will do this by creating a researched based pathway of care from Pre-natal to key stage 3 (11yrs) at which point they will conduct a hand over to a partner charity that works with young people from that age onwards

5.1 Outcomes

The main services provided will include:

- Income maximisation
- Benefit applications
- Energy efficiency information
- Energy efficiency advice
- Fuel debt management
- Educate 1,500 individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness & Gas appliance safety
- Provide CO alarms
- Raise awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- Sign 1,500 families onto the PSR
- Asylum Support services
- Food poverty support services
- Child Poverty Prevention support services

5.2 Success criteria

Number of total beneficiaries over 24 months of Centre for warmth = 3,750 Broken Down as:	Income Maximisation services	Efficient use of appliances & behaviours	Heating & hot water controls	Tariffs & Payments options switching/t raining	Fuel debt managed (payment plan)	Priority services registration offered as appropriate	CO & Gas appliance safety advice	Asylum support services	Food poverty support services	Child poverty prevention support services
400 Asylum Seekers & Refugees	✓ 400	✓ 400	✓ 400	✓ 400	N/A	✓ 400	✓ 400	✓ 400	✓ 300	✓
350 through Children's & families work	✓ 250	✓ 150	✓ 150	✓ 50	✓ 25	✓ 350	✓ 350	N/A	✓ 150	✓ 350
550 Through Centre for Warmth Project Lead	✓ 550	✓ 300	✓ 300	✓ 200	✓ 50	✓ 550	✓ 400	N/A	✓ 300	N/A
2200 Through Community Grocery	✓ 2200	✓ 800	✓ 800	✓ 100	✓ 100	✓ 2200	✓ 100	N/A	✓ 2200	
Totals +/- 10%	3400	1,650	1,650	750	175	3,500	1,250	400	2,950	350

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

In order to deliver the project, where specialist intervention is needed, the centre will be working in partnership with a range of providers which they will signpost to.

7. Potential for new learning

Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date

March 2024 - March 2026

Geographic area

Redcar

Approved by

Eileen Brown

Customer Experience Director