

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:	March 2024
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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 per annum
- 150 CO pre and post surveys per annum
- 65 PSR registrations per annum
- 3 events with 120 people attending, across venues within Bradford per annum
- 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

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
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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:

1. Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
2. Mental wellbeing
3. Financial hardship
4. Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
5. Socio Demographic
6. Household composition
7. Rural Vulnerability
8. Accessibility Including language

9. Medical Dependant on Energy
10. Cultural

4.2 The Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)

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 CIVS, which meets the needs of our stakeholders. The introduction of a dedicated role to support VCMA projects has been welcomed by the ISG.

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
- 150 CO pre and post surveys per annum
- 65 PSR registrations per annum
- 7 Volunteers per annum
- Advice on energy issues and CO awareness will be provided
- 3 events with 120 people attending per annum

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 April 2023 – 31st March 2026

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