

Yorkshire Coast Sight Support - Breathing Safe, Keeping Warm

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

Scarborough Borough has a 1.5% higher number of visually impaired residents over the national average, approximately 5,500 residents (RNIB Figures).

All Yorkshire Coast Sight Support (YCSS) service users are visually impaired, most are 70+ and have a number of additional health conditions. From an initial chat to their luncheon / social groups many were not aware of the dangers of carbon monoxide and almost all don't have CO. It's also very apparent that (YCSS) service users have little knowledge of energy efficiency, keeping warm in the cold or any energy help schemes available to the elderly. Many of YCSS service users live in homes that are too large but are family homes and have memories. There is a mistrust of people coming into their homes amongst their groups, a visual impairment makes you very vulnerable.

1.1 The solution

This project will raise awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and will provide living safe and well tips through monthly talks to YCSS luncheon/social groups. This project will also where appropriate make referrals to other trusted help and advice schemes prior to coming to YCSS. YCSS team will also spend as much of their time completing online forms for their elderly visually impaired customers.

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 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Raise awareness to the dangers of Carbon Monoxide.
- Provide living safe and well tips.
- Provide quarterly updates via a newsletter.
- Partnering up with Age UK North Yorkshire Coast and Moors to provide monthly benefits/debt advice sessions.
- Install CO alarms to those without.
- Carry out a depth of lost insulation check.
- Complete 10% random inspections on anything installed in the property throughout this project.

2.2 Scope

The first stage of the project will be to raise awareness to the dangers of CO and to provide living safe and well tips through monthly talks to YCSS luncheon / social groups. In addition to these talks YCSS will include information on the project in our Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarter newsletters. To help address the lack of benefits/ debt advice knowledge within our members YCSS are partnering Age UK North Yorkshire Coast and Moors (Age UK NYCM) to provide monthly benefits / debt advice sessions directly to each of their social groups. NYCM will also provide short snippets of benefits/ debt advice to be broadcast monthly through YCSS partnership with Scarborough Talking News.

The overall aim is to raise awareness to the dangers of CO and to install a free CO alarm, one alarm per property. The alarms will be installed in an appropriate location as recommended by the Chief Fire Officer. Once they have access to a property the scheme aims to identify any obvious wellbeing and energy efficiency work required. YCSS have access to North Yorkshire Council wellbeing information and will provide a quick check list to the Mates CO alarm installer. In addition, they will also carry out a depth of loft insulation check. If it is identified a loft top up is required, the clients benefit details will be checked by the NYCM Benefits Advisor and the YCSS team and where appropriate a referral made to a registered contractor or the clients utility company. Once a registered contractor visits site, further checks re cavity wall insulation and age of boiler can be made. YCSS service users / clients are unable to use online referral services due to their visual impairment therefore the referral will be dealt with by the YCSS team. Their service users/ client will be asked to feedback on the installation and the quality of the contractor involved. YCSS will complete 10% random inspections on anything installed in the property through this project.

YCSS will have an ongoing CO awareness, are you getting the correct benefits, and wellness campaign running with Scarborough Talking news and included in their weekly news recordings. The main objective of the scheme is to close the circle from CO awareness raising to delivering a home that is CO safe, receiving the correct benefits and warm. Enabling the client to breath safe, keep warm and stay well.

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 VCMA funding, as Yorkshire Coast Sight Support will be directly supporting vulnerable customers by raising awareness of the dangers of CO and installing a CO alarm at their homes if they do not have one.

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 temporary and financial vulnerability themes.

- 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

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

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 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

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

- A minimum of 123 visually impaired service users will receive information in some form to raise their awareness to the dangers of CO.
- The 80 regular attendee at YCSS luncheon / social groups will receive face to face CO, benefits/ debt advice talks each month through the length of the project. From our initial research we are looking to install CO alarms in at least 80 homes.
- 80 homes with newly fitted CO alarms, having had benefits, wellbeing, and loft insulation checks, plus receiving via talking news CO safety information, benefits and wellbeing tips weekly for under £300 per household.
- Make a minimum of 123 PSR referrals.

5.2 Success criteria

- All YCSS vulnerable service users will have a greater understanding of the dangers associated with Carbon Monoxide.

- CO alarms will be installed into properties if the home does not have one.
- Customers will receive benefit and debt advice.

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

Yorkshire Coast Sight Support (YCSS) will be the main contact and the project managers.

7. Potential for new learning

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

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

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.

February 2024 – January 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.

The Borough of Scarborough (Scarborough Whitby Filey).

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director