

South Tees - Maternity Enhanced Maternity Care for vulnerable families 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)

The South Tees NHS Trust provides maternity services to women and families from across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. These areas are some of the most deprived in the country with Middlesbrough being in the top 5 most deprived areas of the UK year on year and 40% of its wards are in the top 3% most deprived nationally.

Their communities experience many of the issues associated with deprivation such as high unemployment, poor population health, high levels of substance addictions, high rates of crime including domestic violence, high numbers of children in care and a significant number of children living in poverty. Both Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland have seen an increase in the number of children living in poverty at well above the national average, with Middlesbrough having the highest numbers of children living in poverty nationally.

It is well documented that women living in areas with higher rates of socioeconomic deprivation are at an increased risk of serious illness and mortality during their pregnancy and their babies are over 50% more likely to die during pregnancy or shortly after birth. The impact of these inequalities continues throughout childhood, with children from the most deprived areas being more at risk from poor physical health, poor educational outcomes and mental health problems which often impact throughout their life, in turn affecting their own parenting abilities and resulting in a cycle of entrenched poor health and educational attainment.

The local wards with the highest rates of deprivation are also the most ethnically diverse, with some areas having 50-60% of residents from minority ethnic groups⁶. The Northeast of England is home to more asylum seekers per 1000 resident population than anywhere else in the UK. The South Tees area has 4 large mother and baby accommodation units, where single women who are pregnant and/or have a child under 5 live. One of the key findings from the national enquiry into maternal deaths is the racial disparities that exist and have remained largely unchanged for over a decade. The Core20Plus5 NHS England approach to support the reduction of health inequalities has identified pregnant women from ethnic minority groups as a target population.

Solution

Maternity services have a unique opportunity during their contact with women and families to make a meaningful impact on their long-term health and wellbeing. Building trusting relationships improves engagement and openness to public health messages. The VCMA funding would allow the delivery of enhanced support to a greater number of women and families as well as the provision of essential mother and baby items to alleviate financial pressures and ensure health needs are met and families have safe and warm homes.

Indigo Team

South Tees Trust have developed a specialist vulnerability maternity team, the Indigo Team, to work alongside the Family Hubs as part of the Start for Life programme. The aim of the team is to provide enhanced care to the most vulnerable women and families in our community, with a focus on perinatal mental health and parent-infant bonding. There is currently funding for five Enhanced Maternity Support Workers (EMSWs) across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. They work as part of the Indigo Team to provide enhanced support to women and families who have been identified as in need. This includes emotional, social and practical support, personalised parent education and signposting to support services. As a team they are currently supporting 165 women. At least 15 of these women would not have attended for their antenatal clinic appointments in their high-risk pregnancy without the emotional and practical support from the team in either organising transport or accompanying women to appointments for support, which would have put them and their baby at risk of adverse outcomes. Due to the short period of time the team has been functioning data is limited however 80% of the women who have been discharged from our care have demonstrated an improvement in their emotional wellbeing as measured by recognised assessment tools.

The team began taking referrals in June 2023 and the numbers have increased month on month, we anticipate this will continue to increase with awareness of the team spreading and the levels of deprivation increasing. We currently receive around 50 referrals per month from community midwives, GPs and support agencies to request support for women and families. Our current provision allows us to offer support to two thirds of these women. This demonstrates a shortfall in our current provision and means a significant number of women and families are not benefitting from the improved outcomes associated with enhanced maternity support.

This project would address the shortfall by recruiting 3 additional Enhanced Maternity Support Workers would allow us to meet this shortfall and further develop the service offered.

Mother and Baby Essentials Programme

The cost of having a baby is significant and many of the families we care for struggle to purchase the essential items for packing in their maternity bag and those required for caring for their newborn. The Indigo Team and wider maternity services are often relying on baby banks and charities to support families obtaining these items. There are programmes elsewhere, including a national Baby Box programme in Scotland, that aim to alleviate these pressures and part of this proposal is to establish a similar scheme at South Tees. Rather than providing the baby essentials in a box that is suitable for sleeping we propose using a Moses basket for the same purpose, this still provides a safe place to sleep for the baby but reduces any associated stigma. A safe place to sleep is essential to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDs), that is the sudden and unexplained death of an infant. Recent figures show that, in contrast to the rest of the UK, rates of SIDs in the North East rose

between 2018 and 2019. Included with the baby essentials would be easy to read material informing parents of safe sleeping advice. Promotion of a safe and healthy environment for the family will be a key theme in the items provided, we will also include a baby thermometer, a room thermometer and a carbon monoxide monitor if required (some families will live in accommodation where these are already provided).

Providing a maternity bag with essential items such as a night gown suitable for breastfeeding, maternity pads and a wash bag will also reduce this financial burden and demonstrate to women that their role is valued. We know that parents whose own care needs are met and who have good self esteem are more emotionally available and responsive to their baby's needs.

When the Moses basket and hospital bag are delivered to the family this will be accompanied by essential public health messages and supporting literature relating to safe sleeping, safe and warm home environments including appropriate room temperature and the importance of carbon monoxide monitoring and supporting parents to register on the Priority Services Register, alongside reiterating information about maternity benefits and local support services. Another benefit of this programme is the reduction on financial pressure mean that women will be in a better position to attend their maternity appointments, we are acutely aware that the costs associated with attending appointments can be a barrier to women accessing essential care for themselves and their baby.

50 essentials packs will be put together every quarter by staff from the Indigo team and volunteers, and then delivered by the staff. This will reduce the need for stock management and storage compared to a rolling programme. The aim is to deliver the majority of the packs that week but will store up to 10 for families who are late transfers to the area, for example women seeking asylum, or where the level of need does not become apparent until close to the birth. Some of the items for the packs will be purchased, including the Moses basket to ensure safety standards are met, the hospital bag due to quantity required and the home safety equipment. However, measures will also be taken to source second hand and donated items. There will be a notecard with the packs requesting that items are donated to local charities or returned to maternity services to be passed on to other families to promote sustainability and reduce waste.

2. Scope and Objectives

The funding requested for the EMSW roles is to cover a period of 18 months as this aligns with when the existing funding will come to an end. At this point a business case will be presented to both the NHS Trust and the Integrated Care Board to take over responsibility for funding the team. There is good support for this locally. This ensures the longevity of the project and sustainability as the project will continue beyond VCMA funding.

Data will be collected regarding the type of support given, pregnancy outcomes and maternal emotional wellbeing, along with case studies to share with Northern Gas Networks

and to support future funding applications. Staff who are part of the Indigo Team will be upskilled and will develop skills and knowledge that they can take to future roles to make a long-lasting impact for vulnerable families. Knowledge gained will also be disseminated to the wider team both through informal conversations and during team meetings and training. We have already facilitated placements for 8 student midwives and two student health visitors who have given very positive feedback on their experiences and the impact it will have on their future practice and even career pathway. Communication with other professionals via the Local Maternity and Neonatal System, attendance at conferences and other professional events will allow the sharing of good practice.

Beyond the year of funding requested for the Mother and Baby essentials programme future funding will likely be sought from external charitable funds or via fundraising through the hospital charity.

Support from the NGN would also allow access to other partners for networking and referrals to increase the benefits to the families they care for.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve health and wellbeing
- To reduce fuel poverty
- Number of women and families supported by the Indigo Team increased by one third
- Advice around home safety delivered to vulnerable families
- Mother and Baby essentials provided to 200 vulnerable families
- Increased referrals to PSR – 200 families
- CO awareness information provided to 200 families

2.2 Scope

- Recruit three enhanced maternity support workers to work as part of the Indigo Team at South Tees NHS Trust in order to increase the number of women and families supported by the specialist vulnerabilities maternity team by one third.
- Establish a Mother and Baby Essentials programme to alleviate the financial pressures associated with having a baby
- Train maternity support staff around supporting and advising families in relation to energy costs, support schemes, maternity benefits and home safety
- Sign up all women onto the PSR

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable customers across the Northumberland locality, addressing fuel poverty as well as raising awareness of CO and the PSR. As the project has mental wellbeing, cultural, temporary vulnerability and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy.

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
 - Socio-demographic
 - Cultural
 - Rural Vulnerability
 - Temporary vulnerability
 - Mental Wellbeing themes
 - Medically Dependent on Energy
- 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 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 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

5.1 Outcomes

The project will provide:

- Mother and Baby essentials provided to 200 vulnerable families
- Increased referrals to PSR – 200 families
- CO awareness information provided to 200 families
- 3 new roles created

5.2 Success criteria

- 200 mothers with increased awareness of and assistance with sign up to, the PSR
- 200 mothers with increased awareness of the dangers of CO
- 200 mothers with increased awareness of energy efficiency
- To improve health and wellbeing
- To reduce fuel poverty
- Number of women and families supported by the Indigo Team increased by one third
- Advice around home safety delivered to vulnerable families

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

- **South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Employer for all staff in the Indigo Team.

Responsible for providing maternity care to approximately 5500 women per year.

- **Middlesbrough Family Hubs**

Co-commissioned the Indigo Team.

- **Redcar and Cleveland Family Hubs**

Co-commissioned the Indigo Team.

Potential for new learning

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

Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

This project has a positive SROI return

VCMA Project start and end date

March 2024 – September 2025

Geographic area

The project will take place across the catchment area of South Tees NHS Foundation Trust.

Approved by

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