

Gateshead Link Up

LinkAge Plus

Good Companions (Age Concern)

Good Companions is a well established service, set up in 1994 by Age Concern Gateshead, which provides a range of services for frail and isolated older people in Gateshead living in their own homes. Link Age Plus (known in Gateshead as Link Up) made a financial contribution to help sustain this project 2006-08.

Good Companions (Age Concern)

Objective

- To reduce social isolation amongst frail and often housebound older people across Gateshead.
- To improve quality of later life.
- To provide people with the opportunity to access a social network.

Activity

The Good Companions project is made up of several different services.

- Home Visits/Befriending.
- Telephone Companions (weekly phone call).
- Travelling Companions (transport, escorting & support for frail older people to visit loved ones in hospital/hospice/care home or to take them to their own hospital appointment).
- Bereavement Support Service (one to one emotional support in the client's home).
- Men's Group.
- Craft Group.
- Two other Social Groups (with one specifically for people living in the rural west of Gateshead).

48 volunteers and 2 staff (1 full-time, 1 part-time) deliver these services to an average of 200 people per week.

Achievements against objectives

Over the period of the project Linkup funding contributed to sustaining 15,000 contacts

We were able to sustain all our Good Companions services during the period of Link Up – but we regularly have a waiting list for our befriending service and social groups. By providing opportunities for social interaction and offering varied activities to encourage mental stimulation and emotional wellbeing, we are making it easier for older people to remain in their own homes. This is especially so as we obviously have access to other relevant Age Concern Gateshead services for our Good Companions clients, as well as external agencies including our Link Up partners.

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- *'The display about mining was great. I worked at the pit and it brought back a lot of memories. I couldn't get to a museum by myself but you made it happen – and then great for us all to go for a pint afterwards.'* – Men's Group member.
 - *'I can feel lonely and depressed when at home all day. I feel entirely different when on an outing – I'm part of a group of friends again after several years of not having a social life.'*
 - *'The Travelling Companion volunteers were all such lovely people – sounds strange but we had such fun in the car. This made the situation with my husband so much easier to bear. If it hadn't been for them, I wouldn't have been able to visit my husband as often as I did in his last days.'* Travelling Companion client who we helped visit her husband of 55 years in a hospice 15 times in his last weeks.

Wider achievements

Partnership working has always been crucial to this project e.g. with social workers, district nurses, GP's. Age Concern Gateshead already had good relationships with many of the Link Up in Gateshead partners and has been able to build further on these for the benefit of clients. For example, a couple of times a year we run a large social event for very isolated men by joining up our Men's Group with the Rowlands Gill Live At Home Scheme Men's Group (one of our Link Up partners).

Clients lead on deciding on their own activity programmes. For example, we supported our Crafts Group (a group of socially isolated older women) who wanted to get involved in a film being produced to mark the 10th anniversary of The Angel of the North.

Resources

£10,000 pa was received from Link Up in Gateshead to help sustain the Good Companions project (which requires £75,000 pa to run). Other income was raised from client contributions, Charles Hayward Foundation, The Big Lottery, Gateshead Council & Lloyds TSB Foundation.

Volunteers are vital to this project and we're delighted to have 48 Good Companion volunteers currently – & we're constantly striving to expand this number.

Key lessons learned

Apart from salaries, transport is the biggest cost for this project.

Further information

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Related documents

See website above.