

LINKAGE PLUS PROJECT

VILLAGE AGENTS

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

in partnership with

GLOUCESTERSHIRE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Gloucestershire County Council, in partnership with the Gloucester Rural Community Council, has successfully set up the Village Agent Project Pilot which covers 162 parishes in some of the most isolated areas of the county. 30 village agents work within clusters of communities which have limited or no access to services locally. The report identifies how the project has more than effectively met the targets set at the beginning of the pilot and achieved the desired outcomes. It has also expanded the project to incorporate wider areas and more people over 50 as Village Agents find their usefulness has been greatly beneficial to those they have already helped. The project initially covered 96 parishes and now covers 162 and is expanding. The Village Agents are also directly responsible for an extra £6,015 in benefit claims per week. In terms of evaluating the Village Agent project and the work of Village Agents this figure equates to £312,780 in extra benefits coming into Gloucestershire.

The project has achieved the following outcomes:

Learning Outcomes

- Support for older people should not be confined to Health and Social Care
- The simple electronic referral system which was developed as part of the project was welcomed by statutory and voluntary agencies, and facilitated joint working resulting in holistic service and information provision.
- Older people are more likely to source information and access services from someone they know and trust, thereby promoting and supporting longer term independence.
- Village Agents promote a positive two way consultation link to council and other services.
- Small actions can have a large effect on promoting well being and reducing social isolation.
- Effective networking and face to face contact is of paramount importance.

These outcomes have resulted in:

- Older people in Gloucestershire villages and particularly those who are older, frail and vulnerable, feel more secure, feel more cared for and have a better quality of life.
- Older people have easy access to a wide range of information that will enable them to make informed decisions about their own well-being.
- Older people are in receipt of any services or assistance that can help them remain independent in their own homes and enable them to feel part of a supportive enabling community.
- Older people are engaged to enable them to influence both development of the Village Agent role and future service provision.

Over the lifetime of the Linkage Project, the work of Village Agents has been extended. They now cover wider geographical areas in order to reach more older people. They have also been key in collecting the research for the project, whether through distributing and collecting questionnaires, suggesting names for focus groups, filling in Gateway forms, and writing up Village Agent diaries and case studies, as well as performing the role they have been engaged to do. The positive response they have received from older people, and the support and encouragement of the project manager, has helped them settle into their role and define how they fit in with their older community's wants and needs. As time has gone on, Village Agents have developed their own networks and have become much more confident in becoming the person older people turn to and knowing how to help. They have helped older people feel their voices can be heard and have increased their visibility within the overall local community. Such is the impact of the Village Agents scheme that other parish clusters, not already included in the already extended area covered by Village agents, have phoned up Gloucestershire County Council asking why they do not have Village Agents!