

Link Age Plus Made Simple!

Devon County Council (DCC) is one of eight local authorities to pilot a new national Government initiative to tackle social exclusion among people aged 50 plus, particularly those who are “harder to reach” such as frailer people and people from minority communities.

Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, Link Age Plus is modelled on the Social Exclusion Unit’s report ‘A Sure Start to Later Life’
<http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=797>

The Devon pilot is an “action learning programme” testing some important ideas to improve access to information and services for people aged 50 plus, which we describe as a single Devon “Gateway”. It also aims to improve the ways older people can influence decisions on things which affect them in daily life by developing a “senior council” for Devon.

The single ‘Devon Gateway’ will be tested in two ways:-

- “Deep outreach” – one to one and small group work with people who have experienced a down turn in their lives leaving them at high risk of social exclusion and ill health, for example because they may have lost the confidence to go out – this is called “mentoring” in this document;
- “Broad Outreach” - through exploring how we can better support staff and volunteers who work at first hand with older people on a daily basis – the “front line” – to work in a more “joined up” way. We recognise that many older people prefer to ask someone they trust about things which worry them – we want to build on this so “no door is the wrong door” for an older person in Devon to knock on.

We have several workstreams to deliver on this plan.

1. **Development of the Customer Service Centre (CSC)**

Care Direct was developed as an holistic information and advice service for people of pensionable age in Devon over the last four years, and now handles social care public calls as part of DCC’s My Devon Customer Service Centre. The Care Direct telephone advice service has reported another record year, having helped older people in Devon successfully claim a massive £4.1 million in welfare benefits in 2005/06. Advisers also help people access services provided in the community – ranging from housing matters, social care and financial benefits, transport and health matters.

Link Age Plus will enable the CSC to sustain and enhance the holistic services delivered by Care Direct.

We have undertaken a ‘baseline and gap analysis’ of the operation of the Customer Service Centre against the Link Age Plus pilot criteria. We are working with the CSC to establish the level of ‘signposting’ and ‘referral-making’ the Customer Service Centre can sustain for each of the Link Age Plus criteria: social care: health services; pensions and benefits; housing; local voluntary sector organisations; streamlined care and financial assessments; holistic approach to housing - home safety and improvement, fire, police and neighbourhood wardens; transport; access to information about employment; adult education; leisure services; advocacy and the need to give independent information; volunteering with guidance; IT and internet access; signposting to financial information including tax issues; access to an Approved Trader Scheme; shopping, gardening, befriending services; support for carers.

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2. **Mentoring service ('deep outreach')**

This work is being piloted in the Crediton area by Upstream and in Exeter by Age Concern Exeter. It is being evaluated by the Peninsula Medical School.

Upstream is an outreach project, working with more isolated and older people in rural mid Devon. Participants are referred equally by health and social care professionals and by family, friends, and self-referral. Upstream 'community mentors' visit people and prompt them to become involved in stimulating creative and social activities, for example experimental print-making, music-making, Tai Chi and painting, either in small, informal, friendly groups in local community venues or in their own homes if they are housebound. These activities lead to sharing experience and skills, greater social engagement, and easier access to information and advice. People become motivated to continue activities with only occasional support from the mentors

Link 2 in Exeter links older people into existing clubs/groups, in order to reduce isolation, give purpose and enjoyment and reduce loneliness. This is particularly relevant to people with anxiety and depression. Mentors and enablers who run groups or work one to one with people are drawn from the Age Concern Exeter pool of paid enablers. This enables good matches, which Age Concern Exeter believe enhances the success of the work with clients.

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Upstream – Simon Goodenough, tel. 01363 778029,
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Link 2 – Karol Chew, tel. 01392 454383 and
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3. **No door is the wrong door ('broad outreach')**

We are providing support and tools to existing front line staff and volunteers to help them more effectively support the older people they routinely work with. It will be piloted in Exeter, Crediton, Great Torrington and Tavistock. Sometimes this has been referred to as "the network(ed) front end" because the front line staff and volunteers can be seen as access points to information and services for the older people with whom they work.

We have developed a "360 degree wellbeing check", a framework which allows older people themselves and people who work with them to consider their lives against the things national research has said are important to getting the best out of life - these include housing and the home, health and healthy living, social and educational activities, neighbourhood information, income, getting out and about, and influencing decision-making.

This "360 degree" approach will be applied to all assessment work undertaken by health and social care staff, and for the pilot will be delivered in the form of

- **a simple leaflet** outlining the approach and signposting to the Customer Service Centre
- **a fridge magnet** to act as a prompt for older people and carers, reminding them of all the information, advice and support available via the CSC
- **other products** for example, mouse mats, aimed mainly at staff and volunteers to remind them of the "360 degree approach" and how to get more information for people they are working with.

The Devon over 50's website – 'Getting the Most out of Life' is now up and running on the County Council's website front page <http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/over50s.htm>. This brings together the 360 degree wellbeing check and an information base to parallel that used by the 'My Devon' CSC so that all the information is available on-line as well as by telephone.

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4. **A Senior Council for Devon**

The pilot will build on the work of AGILE (Action Group in Later Life) to develop a senior council for Devon with representation in local communities across the County. The Senior Council will engage with public service providers and hold events to allow older people themselves to actively participate and influence future service provision within their communities. Local Associations will include hard to reach groups across Devon. This strand of Link Age Plus will be consistent with the best practice advice of the Better Government for Older People programme and give effect to Devon County Council's decision to establish a Senior Council. Work is underway to design and develop a website for the Senior Council.

Following a competitive tendering process, **Peter Fletcher Associates** have been awarded a contract to develop the DSC.

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5. **Evaluation**

The largest component of the evaluation of the Devon pilot will be carried out by the Peninsula Medical School, which will evaluate the "deep outreach" mentoring service. This is a "controlled trial" which will provide a high level of information about the value of the approach compared with existing services. This approach will allow more extensive testing of the value of mentoring as a basis for future investment decisions.

Other aspects of the pilot will also be monitored and evaluated according to local protocol agreed with DWP and within a framework negotiated with the Warwick Business School who are the appointed national evaluators.

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6. **Governance**

Link Age Plus is a national DWP Pilot, overseen by their Pensions Ageing Society Section. Nationally there is a Steering Group, which receives regular reports from each pilot and considers the lessons learned. The eight pilot authorities, with representatives of DWP, make up the Programme Board, which rotates its meetings around the pilot locations.

Locally the Project is overseen by the Link Age Plus Implementation Team (LAPIT) which operates as the local programme board. This includes a wide range of stakeholders, including older people, District Council and Voluntary Sector representation. It is tasked with ensuring the pilot's success.

The LAPIT links into the interagency Older People's Strategic Partnership Group, and the Local Area Agreement management group. It is chaired by Paul Giblin.

A Link Age Plus Operational Group (LAPOG) is coordinated by the Programme Manager. It consists of staff directly involved in delivering the various elements of the programme and a representative of older people (Janet Crocker). Its task is to drive progress on the pilot from day to day.

7. Who's Who

Overall DCC responsibility for Link Age Plus rests with:

Jennie Stephens, Assistant Director, Strategic Planning & Policy, Adult & Community Services

LAPIT chair and operational responsibility: **Paul Giblin**, Head of Public Information & Communication, Adult & Community Services

Programme Manager: **Sue Younger-Ross**

Programme Co-ordinator (Management Information and Evaluation): **Donna Miljus**

Programme Officer (Development): **Nina Parnell**

DCC corporate representation: **Matina Mitchell**

Devon Senior Council development: **Peter Fletcher Associates**

Website: Nina Parnell (**Senior Council**) and **Tony Parker**

Upstream: **Simon Goodenough**

Link 2: **Nicola Weate and Karol Chew**

No door is the wrong door – broad outreach – fridge magnet, leaflet: **Nina Parnell**

Overall project support and other enquiries: **Judy Tennant**

8. Devon Events

Awareness events in the four pilot localities are planned for May and June 2007, and follow up events for the same months of 2008. A county-wide conference is planned for 1st October 2007 the International Day for Older People.

Other contact details :

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AGILE:

Janet Crocker (Chair), tel. 01392 219837

Adult & Community Services:

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Judy Tennant, tel 01392 383503 email judy.tennant@devon.gov.uk

Useful websites:

Upstream: <http://www.upstream-uk.com/pages/homepage.asp>

Link2: <http://www.ageconcernexeter.org.uk/index.cfm?id=3178>

Directgov: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/Over50s/RetirementAndPensions/fs/en>