

NORTHERN CANCER VOICES




Northern
Gas Networks

together
we are
the network

TREAT HEAT OR EAT

HOW WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

When cancer and the cost of living collide,
people face impossible decisions between
treatment, heating their homes and putting food
on the table

**A PARTNERSHIP THAT FINDS AND SUPPORTS THE MOST
VULNERABLE PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CANCER ACROSS THE NORTH**

The challenge



Through our community engagement model, we learned that the cost-of-living crisis was forcing people affected by cancer to make impossible choices between putting food on the table, heating their homes and accessing treatment.



Cancer treatment is free, but accessing it is not. Across the North East and North Cumbria, geographical challenges can mean travelling for hours, navigating different providers and NHS trusts, and facing confusing, costly journeys to care.



This project was developed to offer holistic support: understanding the challenges people face and connecting them with essential services that can make it easier to access the care they need, when it could be life-saving.



NORTHERN Reaching people others miss

CANCER VOICES

Case Study: Meeting People Where They Are

- Last working day before Christmas, in freezing weather, we met a vulnerable man in Grainger Market, Newcastle.
- During conversation, he shared that throughout his bowel cancer treatment he had never been able to afford to put his heating on.
- To prepare for treatment appointments, he would heat water in a pan on an electric stove and wash using this, coping the best he could with very limited resources.
- He told us that nobody had ever asked about or assessed his basic practical needs during treatment.
- We spent time listening to his story, acknowledging the challenges he had faced, and validating his experience.
- Provided targeted signposting to his Social Prescriber and supported a referral to review his energy costs and entitlement to assistance.
- Encouraged him to discuss his ongoing fear of cancer recurrence with his Clinical Nurse Specialist to access further support.
- This interaction highlighted the importance of asking about the everyday realities of people's lives, not just their clinical needs.

Key Learning: People often cope silently with significant hardship. Taking time to listen and explore the realities of daily life can uncover unmet needs that have a profound impact on health, wellbeing, and recovery.



HEAT



NORTHERN CANCER VOICES Impact: Support that makes a difference



Case Study: The Power of Partnership and Connection

- In January, a primary care colleague contacted our project about a woman who was living in her car while awaiting a diagnosis.
- The woman was highly vulnerable and experiencing complex needs, making it difficult for her to seek or access support independently.
- On a cold, dark evening at 8pm, we met the colleague in a Tesco car park to provide an emergency heat pack.
- The pack included a blanket, flask, thermal socks, and a hot water bottle to help her stay warm and safe.
- The primary care colleague delivered the pack directly to the woman, ensuring timely support reached her when she needed it most.
- This response was only possible because of strong relationships and trusted connections across services.
- The situation demonstrated how effective partnership working can help reach people who may otherwise remain unsupported.
- A simple intervention, enabled through a collaborative network, provided comfort, practical help, and reassurance during a very difficult time.

Key Learning: Strong cross-sector relationships enable rapid, person-centred responses and help ensure vulnerable people do not fall through the gaps between services.



NORTHERN Keeping warm, safe and connected

MORE THAN A SHORT-TERM PROJECT: A TRUSTED ROUTE INTO PRACTICAL SUPPORT



WARM

Practical items that help people stay warm and well at home.



Winter warm packs including flasks, hot water bottles, thermal socks, hats, gloves, hand warmers, blankets and other warming items.



Home essentials such as draught excluders, soup sachets and heat dispersers for behind radiators.



SAFE

Support that protects health, home and finances.



Priority Services Register support making sure everyone with a cancer diagnosis knows they should be registered.



Carbon monoxide safety raising awareness of CO poisoning risks and helping people stay safe at home.



Benefits and financial support through signposting to experts, empowering people to contact them, and making direct referrals where established.



Housing support through signposting and referrals to expert services, while empowering people to take action.



CONNECTED

Reducing digital exclusion and building confidence for a more connected future.



Mobile phones and contracts to reduce digital exclusion and help people stay in touch, informed and in control.



Signposting to device-use support so people and communities can build confidence and capability as services move towards digital access through the 10-year plan.



We find people where they are, listen to what matters most, and help them act to ease the burden so they can focus on being warm and well in their homes.



A TRUSTED ROUTE INTO SUPPORT.



**“thank you for making the lives of
migrant women a little better”**

Community partner, Connect 360.



We opened hundreds of conversations.
We didn't just distribute 26 winter warm packs.
Those conversations led to awareness, protection,
support, knowledge and empowerment.
That's the power of community trust.



You can register someone on the Priority Services Register in minutes.
But first, you have to earn the trust that allows conversations to happen.
That's what Northern Cancer Voices does best.