No. 1

Good Practice Guide

Identifying and Targeting Vulnerable Groups

Most Home Improvement Agencies already deal with vulnerable groups of people, in particular, elderly people and disabled people. However, there are often hidden groups of vulnerable people in the community who may not currently be able to access the services provided by agencies. This may be because of language or cultural issues, lack of support services, literacy problems, mental health problems or simply because they are unaware of the availability of agency services.

It can often be very difficult for agencies to actively identify and target particular vulnerable groups in the communities in which they operate. Limited agency resources and the fear of generating higher demand that they might not be able to meet, are two significant factors. Many agencies struggle to cope with current levels of demand for their services and are naturally reluctant to actively seek to increase demand.

However, there are increasing pressures on agencies to be seen to be targeting the services they provide at those people in most need. It is becoming more likely that Best Value and Supporting People frameworks will require agencies to demonstrate their effectiveness in ensuring equity in access to their services and to provide evidence that they are supporting all sectors of the community. Consequently, many agencies are now realising the need and the benefits of proactively identifying hidden vulnerable groups and targeting their services at these groups.

The focus of this good practice guide is on providing advice and ideas about targeting services at vulnerable sectors in the community. It draws on examples of good practice from within the HIA movement and the wider housing and social sector.

■ **Identifying Vulnerable Groups** ■

■ **Planning and Utilising Information** ■

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■ **Monitoring and Evaluation** ■

Who are these vulnerable groups?

In fact, many elderly or disabled owner-occupiers face additional barriers to accessing HIA services. These can include people;

- with learning difficulties
- who experience hearing & visual problems
- who are illiterate, or semi-illiterate
- who are suffering from a mental illness
- who belong to black and minority ethnic groups
- who are suffering from illnesses which are often 'stigmatised' by society
- who are suffering from emotional or physical abuse or neglect
- whose religious / cultural beliefs teach that it is 'not right' to rely on someone outside of your family or community for help
- who live in isolated or rural areas
- who do not speak English as a first language

It is important to remember that people are not necessarily affixed to one category and that, all too often, socially excluded groups such as the above are simply not aware of their right to assistance, advice and help.

Relevant government policy and understanding Social Exclusion

It is clear that the government believes the work of Home Improvement Agencies already reflects one of the fundamental elements of the Supporting People programme – that of enabling people to enjoy an independent life within their own homes. This, combined with the main principles of Best Value (aiming to ensure that public services are responsive to citizens' needs and are of efficient and high quality) should lead to HIAs playing a major role in the provision of higher quality housing support services and improved service levels.

Although the clients of HIAs are people in need of assistance, there are many people who are probably unaware of or unable to contact agencies. Agencies must be aware of these groups and adapt service delivery in response to their needs. Agencies should allow their services to be visible and easily accessible to these groups.

There are many government documents available regarding social exclusion, such as 'New Deal for Communities' and 'A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal'. The Social Exclusion Unit has recently published a number of reports that seek to address the problems faced by socially excluded groups in society. These publications will help agencies gain an understanding of the problem of social exclusion and how

Why are HIAs not assisting all vulnerable groups at the moment?

HIAs already target two key vulnerable groups – older people and disabled people. Some agencies also assist those on low incomes. However, most agencies are small organisations, and due to a high demand for services versus existing staffing ratios, available resources are already stretched. Added to this is the fact that often, the more vulnerable a member of society, the more 'hidden' their needs can be. This is particularly true within the owner-occupied sector, which much of mainstream society mistakenly perceives to be independent, affluent and proactive.

Agencies will no doubt be concerned that demand for their services will become excessive if they proactively seek clients. This can be dealt with by a demand management policy. By implementing a structured approach towards handling excess demand, many agencies have found a decrease in length of time clients have waited for HIA services. For further information on demand management please see our separate good practice guide on this subject.

Identifying Excluded Vulnerable Groups

Establishing local population profiles will help determine the make up of all potential clients. This information about the make-up of the population may already be available to agencies. There are a number of sources that agencies can use in order to seek out information about vulnerable groups for marketing purposes:

- Geographical areas (and accompanying data) have already been identified by most local authorities for regeneration or the specific targeting of vulnerable groups

- Information held by DETR and available on the DETR website

- National Population Census and other data via Office for National Statistics (ONS)

- Most local authorities (Housing Investment Programmes – 'HIP')

- Information held by the Department of Health

- Audit Commission Inspection findings and reports

- English Housing Survey

- Deprivation Indicators (include overcrowding, lack of basic amenities, benefit claims etc)

Planning and Utilising Information

Some agencies may already be aware of 'where' such vulnerable groups reside, or how to access information about them. Below are some tips on how to approach and utilise the information that you will collect on these groups:

- Identify all potential client groups within your area

- Use Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to analyse data

- Look at recent caseload files – what proportion of existing clients represent these groups at present – and in the past?

- Utilise local community groups to help identify sources of information and potential needs - use visits, interviews and open days/evenings

- Create a long-term strategy and action plan in order to reach vulnerable groups – you will not be able to assist all within a short time period given time and resource constraints

- Set specific, realistic goals for your action plan. It is important not to falsely raise the expectations of potential clients and to make constraints understood

- Consider how you will address the needs of specific vulnerable groups who may need assistance, but do not necessarily live in a declared 'deprived' area - effective training of agency staff will help with this

- Other measures such as writing to Parish Councils and other groups working in rural areas may be equally effective in identifying isolated individuals.

LCC Social Inclusion/Building Better Communities Strategy

Case Study 1

Lancashire County Council have a vision of making Lancashire 'a place where growing prosperity represents a better quality of life for everyone'. This requires a commitment to assist those who face economic and/or social disadvantage and to help them 'Build Better Communities'.

LCC conducted 'Green Audits' to provide information from which to identify localities with high levels of deprivation. The green audits built upon existing population data and comprised information on environmental, social and economic conditions. Five indicators were used to identify areas of deprivation: **Unemployment, Low Birth Weight, Burglary, Household Overcrowding, GCSE Achievement**

Any wards which had three out of the five indicators in the top 20% of all Lancashire's wards, were designated an area of deprivation. Lancashire is now targeting resources and developing strategies to help tackle these run-down areas. The 'Building Better Communities Strategy' includes a range of objectives to create inclusion. These include: **'***Enhancing the living environment of people in the identified areas'* and *'Developing approaches that aim to ensure equality of opportunity not only in terms of access to services, but also outcomes'*

Tip - Agencies can benefit from existing local authority strategic work by influencing those who are considered by the local authority as 'priority groups' within geographical areas and utilising existing community resources.

Using Special Needs Surveys

The main purpose of a special needs survey is to allow organisations to obtain a strategic overview of the need for support services via the production of statistical estimates. The data obtained from such a survey can be invaluable for the use of HIAs as it highlights vulnerable groups of people that may otherwise remain 'hidden'. It can also be useful in effecting joint working between HIAs and other partners (such as health authorities, social services and other groups) in order to meet the needs of these individuals.

Tip   A survey may already have been conducted within your area of operation, so check with your local authority first!
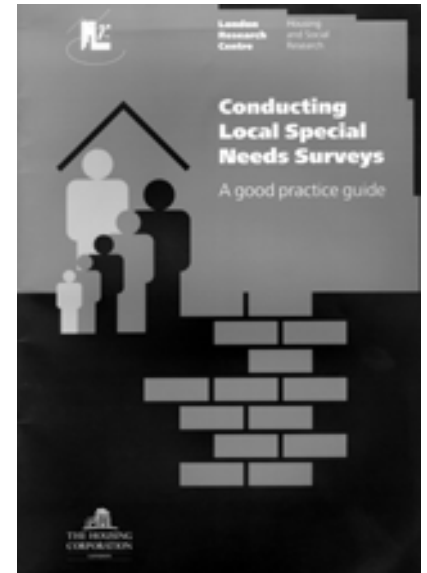
Case Study 2

London Research Centre Special Needs Surveys

This example provides a brief summary of the LRC (London Research Centre) survey method which is used to carry out special need surveys. This method distinguishes needy groups including those with:

- Dementia
- Physical disabilities
- Mental illnesses
- Drug/alcohol problems
- Susceptibility to others

Although not all potential clients may fit into one of the identified categories it is a useful way of identifying significant target populations.

Survey process of the LRC

- Set objectives and parameters for the survey
- Identify existing and potential sources of information (see section above on 'Planning and Utilising Information')
- Collect information on potential clients from other statutory and voluntary agencies
- Create a sample of your potential client groups
- Conduct the surveys
- Organise how the information obtained will be compiled, distributed and utilised
- Analyse and summarise results

We are aware of the financial implications of conducting such surveys, but agencies may be able to gain extra funding or sponsorship for this. Contact your local authority, which may have already commissioned a study of this type or may be able to offer financial support.

A Partnership Approach for Assisting Vulnerable People

The government's Social Exclusion Unit sees social exclusion as 'a problem for the whole community' which can only be tackled by long-term solutions. HIAs that are at the forefront of meeting the needs of socially excluded individuals generally share the following characteristics;

- Good working relationships with local authority departments and regular contact with named officers - Housing (both private renewal and social rented), Social Services, Planning, Environmental Health and Welfare Rights
- Contacts within the voluntary sector (CAB, Age Concern, Help the Aged, disability charities, local charities, community outreach projects, cultural centres, places of worship)
- Contacts within the local health authority
- Contact with local councillors who may be able to 'champion' the work of the agency in the authority's housing / social services committees, etc
- A broad awareness of the workings of central government departments and alternative routes of funding available to HIAs and vulnerable groups

Rochdale

A recent study undertaken by Salford University's Housing and Urban Studies unit on behalf of a partnership of housing providers based in Rochdale interviewed Ethnic Elders living in various forms of tenure in the Borough and found that:

- Only 1 in 20 said they would consider sheltered housing
- 40% of respondents said that, given the choice, they would rather remain in their own homes
- 88% stated that it was important to live in an area where other members of the community lived
- Most elders with health problems did not have and did not identify the need for facilities such as grab rails, walk in showers and downstairs WCs
- 7 out of 10 respondents stated that if they needed facilities they would contact their relatives
- Yet 7 out of 10 younger members of the community recognised that care and support would be needed for Asian elders over the next ten years

Targeting and Communication

Communicating Your Service

Effective communication is essential in order for people to be aware of and use services. Because many of the most socially excluded people in society have little or no understanding of care services, effective communication is vital to ensure that all potential clients are reached. This depends on communicating in the right way, and to the right people.

In general:
- It is a good idea to consider how to provide 'simpler' access to services
- Advice and information must take into account the different needs of people
- Consider the format, cultural appropriateness, and logistics of disseminating your information
- Ensure those with hearing and sight impairments are reached.

Enhance the agency's public profile and support; using a range of publicity methods:
- Leaflets and posters
- Talks
- Newspapers
- Radio
- Issuing community organisations with information about the services offered
- Sending staff to liase with community groups

Devon and Cornwall Housing Association's Care and Repair Agencies

The Devon and Cornwall HA agencies have, like many HIAs, two main target markets: the elderly and the disabled. These agencies have, however, recognised the need to target the most vulnerable elements of these markets, those claiming benefit or with little or no access to the community.

Once an agency is in operation, a number of potential client markets are targeted by the HIA. Health and Social Services Group meetings are attended on behalf of the Agency and the Agency ensures that a presentation about their services and their aims is carried out in this arena.   The agencies also write to Parish Councils, mainly in rural communities, in order to make more isolated communities aware of services on offer.

Agency publications, such as leaflets and posters are put up in local Post Offices in an attempt to inform those collecting disability allowance and pensions about the services on offer to them and   publications are also displayed in GP surgeries.

The level of publicity is then adjusted according to changes in demand resulting from the publicity campaign. If there is still no increase in demand for services by target groups after the campaign then agencies advertise in the local press with material aimed at these specific groups, but only as a last resort.

Agency Training and Communication

Staff and Communication Principles

HIAs need to ensure that their staff and contractors are fully trained and can competently deal with the needs of vulnerable groups. Important factors include the personal qualities and attitude of staff (i.e do they demonstrate a commitment to Equal Opportunities), training of staff and flexibility of their approach.

Checklist

- Ensure staff and contractors know how to communicate in an appropriate manner and how to be sensitive to a clients needs. For contractors, this could be approached in a more 'informal' way – for example holding a Cheese and Wine / Beer and Butties evening for contractors

- Ensure that new staff and contractors are aware of the perceptions of different client groups – i.e the Benefits Agency, found factors common amongst older people:

  - Intense sense of own integrity and honesty
  - A fear of claiming something they are not entitled to
  - A deep-rooted reluctance to claiming means tested benefits

- Recognise community languages as a skill in application forms for staff and contractors

- Provide staff with the opportunity and support to become 'culturally competent' – to learn another language / sign language

- Overcome the problem of agency staff lacking confidence about their ability to provide culturally appropriate services, due to ethnic and language differences, by providing training

- Where necessary use an interpreter – check with your local authority the availability of interpreters in the area or request that your managing agent will support you to use 'Language Line' (NB many RSL managing agents and local authority housing departments already use this service – HIAs may come to some arrangement with such partners in order to access the service)

- Provide translated statements stating that publications are available on request in a range of languages

- Provide staff with the opportunity to learn about specific health needs (i.e dementia treatment, the domestic requirements of AIDS sufferers, awareness of the signs of elderly abuse, etc)

- Adopt recruitment practices which will be attractive to ethnic minority groups, disabled and older people

- Encourage employees interest in other cultures and vulnerable groups by building relationships with community groups i.e attend Open Days, religious festival celebrations, craft days

- Ensure representation for socially excluded groups by inviting a community and/or vulnerable group representative to sit on your advisory board or to provide feedback on your existing policies and practices in this area

- Contact local authorities - most already have a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) housing strategy which will provide information on how to adapt services to become more culturally sensitive

A recent report by De Montford University on the progress of the housing sector's implementation of the MacPherson Report (Stephen Lawrence Enquiry) found that:

- Four out of five RSLs do not have an action plan to implement their race equality opportunities
- One in four RSLs had not assessed their race equality performance against housing associations performance standards
- One in five RSLs did not conduct adequate ethnic monitoring
- RSLs are not meeting the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic customers
- Race Equality issues are not considered a priority by RSLs

The Housing Corporation is currently piloting a Race Equality Toolkit to help housing associations assess their progress on race equality policies, procedures and practices. The Race Relations Act will become law in April 2001

Monitoring and Evaluating Success in Reaching Vulnerable Groups

Monitoring and evaluation is integral to any agency work. It informs staff whether they are meeting service requirements, it supports the process of accountability, highlights the positive and negative aspects of the service and enables agencies to determine levels of satisfaction amongst clients. In short, reviewing your progress is essential if Best Value is to be delivered. There are a number of ways that an agency can gauge effectiveness in this area:

- Ensure that the collation of data is accurate and consistent

- Ensure that the monitoring system guarantees confidentiality

- Carry out satisfaction surveys

- Ask the right questions

Client Satisfaction Surveys

- Devise a short, simple, but comprehensive questionnaire

- Think about the *needs* of your client group – don't just ask them to fill in a form if it is not appropriate.

- Ask the client whether they would prefer to complete the survey on their own (and provide a pre-paid envelope) or whether they would like to complete it immediately with assistance.

- Ask them open-ended questions such as 'How could we have made this service better for you?' and 'What would have made your life easier throughout the whole process?' Closed questions can falsely skew satisfaction ratings to a high level

- Ensure that 'satisfaction' information is analysed, objectively reported and used to improve future service delivery

- Ensure that any complaints are kept, along with the action taken, and whether the client was eventually satisfied

- Consider any suggestions for improvement that are made by clients

- Consult with vulnerable groups to see what they need/want from your service rather than what you assume they want

Leeds Care and Repair

Leeds Care and Repair is aware of and responds to the diverse needs of its potential client groups. Policies and projects undertaken by the agency provide good examples of how to ensure that vulnerable elements of the community are being met.

The agency has undertaken a number of projects to ensure it is catering for the needs of all potential client groups. One example of this is, when details where obtained from the local council about all the elderly people, (those over 60 years of age), in the Leeds area who received Council Tax benefit. A mailshot to these target groups was compiled and each person was sent information promoting the HIA's services. This example clearly highlights the effectiveness of working in partnership with other agencies.

Leeds Care and Repair also recognises the barriers faced by minority ethnic groups. It offers all potential clients the chance to obtain literature in minority languages. Moreover, two of the agency caseworkers are able to speak a range of Asian languages. This not only helps overcome language barriers, but due to the employees backgrounds it helps overcome cultural differences both internally as well as externally.

Beacon Schemes 'Independent Living For Older People'

The Beacon Council Scheme facilitates the improvement of services by allowing local authorities and their partners to share good practice. By attaining information on best practice and experiences of other service providers with a record of excellence in improving the lives of local people, organisations are able to learn from the experience and knowledge of others.

One of the Beacon Schemes is targeted directly towards older people. A scheme to identify the needs and wants of older people, not just in terms of health and social care, but also housing, transport, education and leisure has been in place since autumn last year. The aim of the Scheme is to develop a strategy to dissolve social exclusion.

Examples of local authorities who have gained Beacon Status due to their services for Independent Living For Older People include, Leeds City Council, Manchester City Council and London Borough of Camden

Telephone Contacts

DETR (Policy and Central services)	0207 9443000
Beacon Councils	0207 2966571
NHS	
National Statistics Office	0207 9443333
Department of Health	0207 2104850
Department of Health Minicom	0207 2105025

Useful Web Sites

www.supporting-people.detr.gov.uk   www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk
www.housing.detr.gov.uk   www.doh.gov.uk
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk   www.nhs.uk
www.statistics.gov.uk   www.lancsbbc.org.uk