

Evidencing the case for FirstStop Advice for older people



FirstStop is a free independent information and advice service for older people, their families and carers. It covers housing, care, finance and rights, and is provided through a national Advice Line and website, through local partners and through peer support from other older people. It aims to enable older people, with their families and carers, to make informed choices and to access local services which can help them repair and adapt their homes, help them to continue to live independently at home or support them to move to more appropriate accommodation.

The FirstStop model

Key to the FirstStop model is a partnership between national and local service delivery partners, including charities as well as local authorities. At

national level the service draws on the specialisms of several key organisations. Locally, home improvement agencies and Age UKs are particularly important in offering casework, advocacy, support or practical assistance to clients.

FirstStop's service varies according to each client's needs, from information only (via the website), individually tailored advice (in person or via e-mail or telephone) to in-depth advocacy and practical support (from local caseworkers). This combination means that older people, their family and carers are helped in the most cost-effective way, determined by their level of need and the personal and social resources they have.

Achievements and benefits

The **Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR)** is evaluating the FirstStop service. This paper reflects on the achievements of the service between 1st April 2011 and end of March 2012.

Local/national – building capacity by working together

Supported financially by DCLG via FirstStop, **local agencies were able to increase their capacity** and undertake more in depth work with clients. **They also benefited from resources**

provided by the national partners, including comprehensive directories of specialist housing, care and support services; training; mentoring; quality assurance and access to specialist knowledge.



“Many customers have more than one problem, and they are inter-connected. It is better to deal with them all rather than refer them to separate advisors. FirstStop means we were able to increase our capacity”. (FirstStop local partner case worker)

Long-term benefits for older people

The most common intervention was support to people with chronic health problems to remain independent, which affected over three quarters of the people interviewed. Over two thirds of the people who received this intervention were helped a lot. The desire to remain independent was striking and shows the importance of good housing in improving health.

Safely home from hospital

Client D is very happy that he was able to return home. He did not want to impose upon his daughter and was very keen to remain independent. He no longer needs visits from a carer as he can use the stair lift and walk in shower. He said he is much happier now that he is home, and that the additional income makes a difference; he would have struggled without it.



The analysis for this research found that for 18 out of the sample of 21 clients, the benefits of the support received were maintained over the long term.

Help to get back on her feet

Client E is in her 80s and was an owner occupier living in a first floor flat. She is severely disabled and has various health problems. She wanted to move somewhere more suitable but needed support. I helped her sell her property, remove clutter and move to her new sheltered flat. She said: *"I was on the verge of going mad and thought I was going to have a breakdown. They were a lifesaver...."*



Delivering savings to the public purse

The evaluation looked at client cases from the local partner case studies to explore how the case work intervention might have reduced expenditure by local authorities and health services.

Analysis showed that savings were generated even over a relatively limited time.

- The Somerset West service **generated overall savings of more than £45,000** in one year, after allowing for the cost of the service itself.
- Elsewhere, analysis of ten cases showed **an average saving to the public purse of over £3,014 per person**. The service had assisted some clients to remain in their own home with adaptations or home care and/or improved income, and others to move to sheltered housing or to downsize.

Supported to remain in own home

Mrs B was 75 years old and lived alone in her own first floor flat. She loved her home but was having difficulties with her mobility especially on the stairs. Our caseworker visited Mrs B to discuss her options. Knowing that she preferred to remain in her own home, the caseworker organised the fitting of equipment, including grab and stair rails and a bath seat. He also identified that Mrs B may qualify for Attendance Allowance and made the application on her behalf. Mrs B was able to remain living in her home where she is happier and can afford to pay for extra help at home when she needs it.

Increasing income to facilitate choice and independence

Analysis of cases from those local partners who focused on income maximisation found that **the benefits to individual clients averaged £2,050 per person per annum in additional income**.

This could fund significant improvements to an individual's quality of life and also benefit the wider local economy:

"I've brought in £3/4 of a million in extra benefits, all of which is spent on gardeners, taxis etc, on all the things which make a person independent. So it benefits both individuals and the wider community" (Local case worker)



Evaluation continues

CCHPR is currently undertaking further evaluation of FirstStop's national service via customer satisfaction surveys, and also interviewing clients of 15 new DCLG-funded local services.

All reports published to date can be found at:

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/projects/detail.asp?ProjectID=166>

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