



Making the Housing Connections

An interim evaluation of the Silverlinks Programme

Silverlinks is funded by



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Acknowledgements

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We also wish to thank the National Older People's Housing Champions network (www.housingactionblog.wordpress.com) for sharing their views in relation to this evaluation and for their invaluable input into overseeing the implementation of the Silverlinks programme.

Thanks are due to The Elderly Accommodation Counsel without whose national housing and care information and advice website and telephone advice line much of this work would not be possible.

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Most of all we are grateful to the Silverlinks volunteers who are making such a difference to so many older people's lives.

About Care & Repair England

Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing. It believes that all older people should have decent living conditions in a home of their own choosing. It innovates, develops, promotes and supports practical housing initiatives & related policy and practice which enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they wish, particularly for older people living in poor or unsuitable private sector housing. www.careandrepair-england.org.uk
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About the Silverlinks initiative

Silverlinks is a Care & Repair England initiative, funded by the Big Lottery Silver Dreams Fund, which is enabling older people to make more informed decisions about their housing & related care. It is helping to create networks of mutual support whereby older volunteers share their personal housing experience, offering one to one help as well as providing information & advice to other older people. It is also raising awareness about housing & care options in later life by spreading knowledge through older people's informal networks, offering 'Pass it on' workshops, talks and training.

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Overview

Silverlinks works with older volunteers to spread information about later life housing and care options to older people, and also to provide individual 'peer to peer' support for older people who are facing life changing decisions related to their homes.

This report considers the impact that working with, and not just for, older people can have on enabling older people to make a more informed decision about their future housing and care.

It looks at the complementary role that older people with lived experience of housing related life changes can play when working alongside integrated, impartial advice services operating within local Care & Repair schemes, home improvement agencies or Age UKs and backed up by the the national Elderly Accommodation Counsel's FirstStop service.

The report quantifies and describes the impact of peer to peer information delivery and one to one support that involves older volunteers. It considers the benefits and potential use of the Silverlinks approach by a range of organisations that provide information & advice and/or housing services for older people. It discusses how integrating aspects of this model into current ways of working could contribute to improvements in delivery.



"Silverlinks is needed to help older people to know the information to enable them to make decisions. Personally Silverlinks has taught me such a lot and given me confidence to bring awareness to older people I meet at groups, activities and in everyday life."



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Foreword

This is the third year for Silverlinks. Care & Repair England is pleased and proud of the achievements to date and excited with the prospect of further success in the time remaining.

We are grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for having the vision four years ago to see the real opportunities Silverlinks offers.

As we grow older we all need to plan for our future needs. The suitability and manageability of our housing needs are central to this. Who better to offer advice, counselling and mentoring help than other older people, acting as volunteers, who have experienced the same decisions and dilemmas?

Many organisations speak of the importance of recognising the skills and experience older people can bring. Silverlinks has provided, and will continue to facilitate the use of older people's experience and wisdom to help achieve the best outcomes for others.

I look forward to another 18 months of progress and I trust that the present success continues.

John Simmons
Care & Repair England Trustee
Chair of the National Older People's Housing Champions Network



John Simmons (third from left) and some of the members of the Older People's Housing Champions Network

Summary

Policy Context

Where you live as you get older is a major determinant of your quality of life.

A safe, suitable home can underpin health, whilst feeling in control of where and how you live has a significant impact on well-being.

Making an informed choice about your home and care in later life, particularly at key transition points such as onset of disability, health decline or bereavement, is therefore of the utmost importance.

Trustworthy, impartial information and advice on possible options about the interconnected issues of housing, care and related finance plays a critical role in enabling older people to live well and age well, to make informed decisions and determine their own futures.

Aim of Silverlinks and results so far

The headline objective of Silverlinks with regard to benefiting older people is that older people involved with the project feel better able and prepared to manage life changing transitions, particularly with regard to their housing and living situations.

The current “Flagship” phase of the Silverlinks initiative has been funded by the Big Lottery as part of its Silver Dreams programme since April 2014. The programme is funded for 4 years until March 2018 and this evaluation looks at the emerging results after two years of operation.

At the time of the evaluation (Summer 2016) Silverlinks projects were being delivered in partnership with local Care & Repair services, home improvement agencies and Age UKs in seven areas spread right across England; Nottingham (and some areas of Nottinghamshire), Northumberland, West of England (Bristol & North Somerset), Wigan, Preston (and areas of SW Lancashire), West Cumbria and Cornwall. In addition, workshops and awareness raising events have been delivered in a wide range of other locations.

In the first two years of operation virtually all of the Silverlinks targets with regard to benefits to individual older people are being surpassed (the only one not so far met is the number of self help information downloads from the blog/website).

- *2,494 older people have been directly involved in project activities (vs target of 1,365) and of these*
- *85% reported improved ability to plan ahead, 92% improved knowledge of where to go for information & advice (vs target of 75% for both)*
- *548 older people have been supported by Silverlinks volunteers on a one to one basis (vs target of 480)*
- *16,008 older people have received information about housing and care options via ‘pass it on’ workshops, talks and events (vs target of 11,000)*
- *1,544 people have downloaded self help information (vs target of 5,000)*

The Silverlinks project is revealing a great demand for information about housing and care options in later life amongst a spectrum of older people from all ages and social groups.

The high level of change achieved with regard to improved ability to plan for and manage changes to housing and care situations, is surpassing expectations and the model of information & knowledge transfer is working well.

Amongst the Silverlinks volunteers there is a huge willingness and desire to share experience and ‘spread the word’. In addition, there is evidence of significant personal benefits arising from this volunteering.

Cost savings to the state is not a set objective for this project. However, the findings emerging from the individuals who were interviewed as part of this evaluation do illustrate the clear potential benefits to the NHS and social care, as well as to individuals, and are in line with other reports, particularly of the EAC FirstStop programme, which developed a methodology to quantify such gains which is illustrated in their report ‘*Making the Case*’ (2015).

Housing and care options information and advice is a scarce but highly valued resource. It is clear from the evaluation that the Silverlinks model can help to increase the capacity of such provision by enabling older volunteers to play a complementary role working alongside skilled professional advisers.

Context

Policy Context

Integration of health and social care is currently high on policy agenda, with prevention and reducing use of acute services more generally, driving many reforms and initiatives.

As older people are the main users of health and care services, reducing such use through ensuring that more older people live in a safe, suitable home has benefits for:

- *The NHS, through reduced GP visits, fewer emergency hospital admissions (eg. following falls at home or exacerbation of chronic health conditions through cold homes) and faster hospital discharge to the older person's current home*
- *Social Services - through extending independent living at home, delaying or avoiding admission to residential care*
- *Individuals - through improved quality of life and greater independence as well as reduced care costs as rising numbers of people must now pay for their own care*

The Care Act 2014 highlighted the importance of suitability of accommodation in determining well-being and also cited provision of information and advice as a key component in a system that shifted away from crisis intervention to prevention.

The Care Act 2014 introduced a specific responsibility for local authorities with regard to provision of information and advice, and the related **Guidance** set out housing as a critical component in meeting this Duty.

Clause 4 (1) of the Care Act 2014 states:

A local authority must establish and maintain a service for providing people in its area with information and advice relating to care and support for adults and support for carers.

Care Act Guidance Section 3: Information and Advice

There are 69 paragraphs expanding on the provision of information and advice including:

3.5 The local authority must ensure that information and advice services established cover more than just basic information about care and support and cover the wide range of care and support related areas set out in paragraph 3.24 below. The service should also address prevention of care and support needs, finances, health, housing, employment... and other areas where required. In fulfilling this duty, local authorities should consider the people they are communicating with on a case by case basis, and seek to actively encourage them towards the types of information and/or advice that may be particularly relevant to them.

3.24 The breadth of the circumstances under which information and advice must be provided, and the overall duty to promote individual wellbeing, means that local authorities must ensure that the subject matters covered by their information and advice available to people in their areas go much further than a narrow definition of care and support... the service should also include, but not be limited to, information and advice on:

- available housing and housing-related support options for those with care and support needs;
- availability of services that may help people remain independent for longer such as home improvement agencies, handyman or maintenance services;
- availability of befriending services and other services to prevent social isolation;
- availability of intermediate care entitlements such as aids and adaptations;
- eligibility and applying for disability benefits and other types of benefits;
- raise awareness of the need to plan for future care costs;
- practical help with planning to meet future or current care costs;

This emphasis on information and advice in the Care Act is welcomed as it has been identified as key to later life decision making in a spectrum of related national policy reports including:

- *House of Lords Inquiry 'Ready for Ageing?' (2011)*
- *Department of Health's 'Caring for our Future' (2012)*
- *Successive governments' housing strategies, including 'Laying the Foundations' (2011) and 'Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods' (2008)*
- *Lord Wei's report 'Life Transitions and Retirement in the 21st Century' (2012)*
- *The Low Commission 'Tackling the Advice Deficit' (2014)*

The key challenge now is to transform a welcome idea into local reality.

Social Context

The shift in the age profile of the population in England is starkly reflected in the age profile of households.

- *Older people (55+) live in 43% of all homes - 9.5m households*
- *96% of older households are living in mainstream homes - 4% in specialist housing (sheltered, retirement, extra care)*
- *The vast majority of older households are owner occupied - 76% compared with 18% social rented and 6% private rented*
- *There are around 500,000 specialist homes - 77% for rent*

The majority of household growth over the forthcoming decades will be older households, particularly amongst the 'older old', with the number of people over 85yrs set to more than double (rising from 1.5m in 2011 to 3.2m by 2034).

The clear link between health and housing conditions has been well documented and quantified, particularly by the Building Research Establishment, whose report *'The Cost of Poor Housing to the NHS (2011)'* estimates the cost at £1.4billion.

The cost to the NHS, in first year treatment costs, of the poorest housing among older households (55yrs+) is c. £624 million.

The Evidence for timely interventions

One of the biggest decisions that older people can face is about their future housing and living situations, particularly in the face of major life transitions such as retirement, health decline, onset of disability or bereavement.

Nearly three decades of Care & Repair England's work to help older people with housing problems, as well as numerous studies, research reports and policy analysis, tells us that access to trusted, impartial information and advice is critical to later life decision making.

Independent evaluations of Care & Repair England's *'Should I Stay or Should I Go?'* housing in later life advice initiative and the subsequent *'If only I had known'* (housing advice and help in hospital) project, specifically identified the critical role of impartial information and independent advice about housing and care options at key life transition points.

The impact and fiscal gains of trusted, impartial housing and care information and advice has been described in a series of reports by Cambridge University who have evaluated the Elderly Accommodation Counsel's government backed FirstStop (EAC FS) initiative. In the most recent independent evaluation of the complementary mix of EAC FS national and local FS services it concluded that the provision of impartial housing and care options information & advice resulted in:

- **Significant savings to the NHS & Social Care**
An investment by DCLG of just under £500,000 in the information, advice and service brokerage delivered by EAC FirstStop local partners delivered approximately £11.5 million annual savings arising from the avoidance of falls, unplanned hospital admissions and GP appointments.
- **Contributed to the achievement of NHS, Adult Social Care and Public Health Outcomes and Targets**
Wellbeing was improved for 59% of older people and health outcomes for 43%.

Doing more for less, doing things differently

Impartial, accessible housing advice, particularly affordable or free help for the most vulnerable, is under great financial pressure and there is emerging evidence that the voluntary sector is being particularly squeezed.

One view is that now people can access so much information online, creating website self help information is enough to meet needs, and even meet the requirements of the Care Act 2014. However, this approach does have significant limitations, particularly for 'older old' people and more vulnerable groups, a high proportion of whom do not have internet access.

ILCUKs Nudge or Compel report noted that 77% of over 75s did not use the internet, concluding that training in use of information and decision making was as important as internet access.

Despite this lower usage amongst older groups, the EAC housing and care options website had over 4 million visitors last year, but around half were relatives and friends of older people, highlighting the pent up demand for such information.

Information access is also only part of the story. Advice tailored to a particular person's circumstances is a critical next step in effective decision making, whilst a minority will also need practical help to make life changes, particularly those who are isolated, without family and friends.

It is against this backdrop that current information and advice providers are trying to find new ways to 'do more for less'. The Silverlinks model of peer support, self help and encouragement to think and plan ahead for later life is a timely way to expand the capacity of providers, whilst recognising that this is a complementary function which only works if there are skilled, knowledgeable advisers available to back up older volunteers.

Silverlinks is extending access to housing and care information in innovative ways, building on the understanding that older people gain much of their information and support from their peers. The results of the pilots so far are also demonstrating the need.



"It (knowing more about housing and care options) makes me feel settled and able to deal with things better myself... puts you at ease as you know where to go for help".

About Silverlinks

The Silverlinks project aims to increase older people's capacity to manage the key life transition of where to live in later life. It is about enabling older people to make more informed decisions about whether or not to continue to live in their current home, possibly to adapt that home or sometimes to move. It supports this decision making either at a point of crisis eg with onset of disability or following bereavement, or in advance of such life altering events.

The approach helps to build resilience and enable self help, primarily through linking older people who have dealt with similar life transitions to those facing similar dilemmas.

Older people pass on information and raise awareness about later life housing and care options; they share their personal experiences and offer mutual support to more vulnerable older people.

Background

The Silverlinks initiative started out as a small scale pilot, one of just over 30 pioneering projects selected from 1,400 ideas submitted to the Big Lottery Silver Dreams Fund in 2011.

From an initial idea, it was developed into a three centre pilot project delivered in partnership with Care & Repair agencies operating in Bristol, Manchester and Leeds. The pilot phase ran from October 2012 to March 2014.

Following a further competitive bidding process, Silverlinks was selected to be part of a 4yr Flagship programme, again, supported through the Big Lottery Silver Dreams Fund, with the aim of expanding adoption of the model through a range of different organisations working with older people across England. This programme is running from April 2014 to March 2018.

The learning from the Silverlinks pilot has been used to build the capacity of a wide range of organisations to equip older people with the information they need to manage life changing events now and in the future, primarily through utilising the knowledge and experience of older people themselves. Encouraging planning ahead for later life housing and care is also an important part of the programme.

Our National Older People's Housing Champions group has been closely involved in shaping and overseeing the programme and small grants for local activities have enabled active participation by older people and smaller local groups in the project roll out.

The major national provider of later life housing and care information and advice, EAC FirstStop, plus the co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies, Foundations, as well as local Age UK agencies, are all active partners in this project, and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is also a contributor. Silverlinks is informing the policies and practice of the partners, with the incorporation of aspects of the Silverlinks model into local services.

The Idea

Silverlinks aims to enable older people who are facing life changing choices about their homes and living situations to make well informed decisions, as well as supporting thinking and planning ahead for later life housing and care.

It does this mainly by:

- **Connecting older people** who are facing housing changes, or sometimes a housing crisis, with older people who have already faced and dealt with a similar situation. Common triggers for major housing/care decisions include, onset of health problems, loss of mobility and bereavement. These changes may prompt people to consider whether they can or should adapt their current home to enable them to maintain their independence or possibly move to a different home.
- **Raising awareness about later life housing and care options** so that more older people can better manage later life transitions including, where possible, to plan ahead, and make well-informed decisions about their living situations, rather than having to react to a future crisis.
- **Spreading information about later life options and the potential availability of housing and related services, plus professional advice** - this is particularly important for people who are not yet ready to make significant life changes but who benefit from knowing who to contact for advice & support should the time come when they need this.

The Silverlinks Model

Local Silverlinks projects are delivered in partnership with Care & Repair England by a range of locally run agencies working with older people, primarily with home improvement agencies (HIAs) and local Age UKs.

Care & Repair England manages the whole programme, supporting the local agencies to apply the national model and utilise the information, training and related materials. Care & Repair England also directly delivers talks and workshops in areas of England where there is no current local Silverlinks project. The overall direction of the initiative is overseen by the National Older People's Housing Champions Group.

There are currently seven local agencies (see Appendix A) which are being funded through the programme to deliver local Silverlinks services, and there is an aim of increasing this to at least ten by the end of the programme in March 2018. Silverlinks projects are currently delivered in partnership with local Care & Repair services, home improvement agencies and Age UKs in; Nottingham (and some areas of Nottinghamshire), Northumberland, West of England (Bristol & North Somerset), Wigan, Preston (and areas of SW Lancashire), West Cumbria and Cornwall. In addition, workshops and awareness raising events have been delivered in a wide range of locations across England.

Whilst the overall model for Silverlinks is the same in each area, the mix of elements differs locally depending on factors including; the profile of the local population; mix of housing stock; socio-economic characteristics; local operating context; range of related services offered by the local agency; the number of local Silverlinks volunteers and importantly, their particular interests, knowledge and skills.

The other important element to Silverlinks is access to the national Elderly Accommodation Council's FirstStop (EAC FS) website and telephone housing and care options advice service. This is the national source of impartial, specialist information that older people who take part in Silverlinks workshops are directed to.

All local services include a combination of the following elements.

PEER TO PEER SUPPORT

Older people who have some personal experience of making housing decisions, such as carrying out home adaptations, repairs and/or moving home, or who have experience of helping someone else through such changes, can become Silverlinks volunteers. They provide support and a "listening ear" to other older people who are currently facing housing decisions, perhaps at a time of crisis eg after experiencing loss of mobility or health decline.

These Silverlinks volunteers are able to share their own experience, helping the older person by giving them time to talk about and think through their situation, considering what options may be available to them. Where this is required the volunteers provide information about where to go for further more specialist advice and practical support. They do not get involved in personal finances, in depth advice giving, legal matters, complex cases and/or counselling and so play an important complementary role to that of professional advisers.





'PASS IT ON' WORKSHOPS

Silverlinks aims to raise awareness and spread information about later life housing, care and related finance amongst as many older people as possible, so that more people are equipped with the knowledge of what options may be available to them, and also know where to go for advice and practical support as and when needed.

The workshop approach encourages and enables people to think ahead so that they will be better able to manage life transitions in the future, are ready and able to make a more informed decision that's right for them and to be less likely to have to make drastic changes at a time of crisis.

"*Pass it On*" workshops are delivered in local areas and across England by a mix of paid workers, freelance trainers and local Silverlinks volunteers (who may deliver shorter initial talks to a wide range of local social groups). Each workshop attendee is given information to take away and is encouraged to share this and pass on information to their friends and neighbours. As noted above, Elderly Accommodation's FirstStop website and telephone advice line is the main national source of impartial, specialist information that older people who take part in Silverlinks workshops are directed to.



ONLINE RESOURCES

A range of online self help resources has been developed by Care & Repair England for older people who are thinking about their future housing & care. These include; short films of Silverlinks volunteers talking about their own housing experiences; an online 'Housing Options' interactive 'workbook' which helps people think through their own situation and consider possible future housing decisions; blogs from local Silverlinks projects describing particular situations; and important links to other key contacts, resources and advice services such as Elderly Accommodation's FirstStop.

Local delivery examples

Talks to groups.

Older volunteers may carry out talks to groups independently, or alternatively accompany the Silverlinks worker and share their experiences with the audience afterwards.

Local illustration: West of England Care & Repair

Older people from across the city are invited to attend "Pass it On" workshops at the West of England Care & Repair building which incorporates a 'home independence centre' - a showroom with examples of equipment and adapted kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms and bedrooms. The Silverlinks coordinator delivers the main part of the workshop, and as part of this a volunteer gives a short talk about their own related experience eg moving home, having adaptations installed etc. The volunteer then takes the group around the equipment demonstration centre where they show different examples of aids and adaptations available.

Volunteers also visit older peoples' groups such as stroke support, carers' groups, WI, dementia cafes etc, and give short talks about housing and care in later life, including sharing their own experience.

Intended result: older people are better informed of what's available and know where to go for information, advice and practical housing services and support.



Information stands at key locations

Older volunteers staff information stands at key locations in places where older people are likely to attend, such as hospitals and health centres, plus at special events for older people.

Photo: WECR Silverlinks volunteers

Local illustration: Age UK Cumbria

This Silverlinks project has regular stands at healthcare centres across Cumbria. Silverlinks volunteers staff this alongside the Silverlinks co-ordinator so that they are available for any older people to ask any questions they have about their housing and care. Individuals can pick up information about available services and also arrange for a more in depth talk with either a volunteer or a specialist Housing Options adviser. The volunteers feel that this informal approach works well and that it reaches people that may not otherwise know about or contact the services offered, often at a time when they are experiencing health

problems that are impacting on their living situation.



Intended result: Older people who may not approach information or housing services (or even know they are there) are better informed and reassured that there is someone impartial & empathetic they can contact.

Hospital "ward rounds"

Silverlinks volunteers go into a hospital, alongside the Silverlinks worker or hospital liaison officer, to talk to individual patients and/or their families offering a listening ear and ensuring that people know where to get housing & care information, advice and help both before and after discharge.

Photo: Age UK Cumbria Staff and local healthcare centre

Local illustration: Lings' Bar Hospital, Nottingham

Lings Bar hospital is a rehabilitation unit in South Nottingham specifically for older people. Many of the patients are close to being



discharged. Although the OTs and nurses at the hospital do all they can to prepare people for leaving hospital and returning home there are often practical housing considerations which patients & families have not thought through or may be worried about. The Silverlinks Co-ordinator visits the hospital alongside a Silverlinks volunteer and talks to patients, their families and carers on the wards and in the day lounges about any specific concerns they may have about their housing & care, giving them information about making their home a better place to live with their condition, and offering further contact with a Silverlinks volunteer if they need more time to talk through their situation once back home.

Intended result: Older people are reached at a pivotal point and are better informed about support available to them, and know where to go for advice and practical assistance. Receiving help to make sure their home is suitable can help to prevent hospital re-admissions.

Targeted events

Silverlinks workers may arrange special community-focussed events eg conferences, information days etc, bringing together a variety of services and Silverlinks volunteers are on hand to contribute to talking to individual delegates, answering questions and generally 'spreading the word'.

Photo: Notts volunteers at Nottingham Riverside Health Centre

Local illustration: Northumberland

Age UK Northumberland has delivered a series of topic based conferences in a variety of locations (this is a very rural area) where older people are invited to attend and find out about local services. Other relevant organisations are able to come along and provide advice, give talks and run information stands. The day includes talks about housing & care in later life. Volunteers are then available to talk to older people about their own experiences.



Intended result: Events reach more isolated older people who are then better informed about services available and know where to go for information & advice to help them make their own, better informed decisions about their housing & care.

Photo: Silverlinks workers Northumberland

Evaluation Methodology

This interim evaluation aims to assess progress being made towards achieving some of the Silverlinks programme's intended outcomes half way through its four year duration.

Intended Outcomes

The programme is aiming to achieve three main Outcomes

OUTCOME 1: Older people involved with the project feel better able and prepared to manage life changing transitions, particularly with regard to their housing and living situations

OUTCOME 2: Organisations which provide older people with housing and care advice or related services incorporate later life housing options awareness raising, volunteering and self help by older people, for older people, into their local delivery models

OUTCOME 3: Organisations working with older people change their policies and practice to incorporate housing and care options information and advice related provision based on the evidence and learning from the Silverlinks programme

The below three Silverlinks outcomes are linked to the Big Lottery's overall programme intended outcomes which are:

1. increased resilience amongst older people to manage key transitions in their lives
2. improving the capacity of organisations working with older people to enable them to deliver lasting change
3. learning from the programme is used to inform the policy and practice of organisations working with older people

This evaluation is particularly focussed on OUTCOME 1.

Indicators to measure progress towards achieving Outcome 1 as agreed with the Big Lottery are set out in the table below.

Outcome 1: Older people involved with the project feel better able and prepared to manage life changing transitions, particularly with regard to their housing and living situations

INDICATOR	INDICATOR LEVEL	TIMESCALE
1. Number of older people taking part in project activities who report improved ability to plan for and manage changes to their housing and care situations	3,555 older people take part in project activities, including 'Later Life Housing and Care Options' volunteer training, pass it on workshops, age-friendly audits or access the self help materials. 75% report improved ability after contact with project/activity	Year 1: 540 Year 2: 825 Year 3: 1,020 Year 4: 1,170 TOTAL: 3,555
2. Number of vulnerable older people linked to older volunteers who feel more in control and better able to manage their housing and living situations	1,360 older people facing housing and related care life crises eg. moving home, installing home adaptations and/or find carers, will have talked to and been supported by another older person with related personal experience	Year 1: 200 Year 2: 280 Year 3: 380 Year 4: 500 TOTAL: 1,360
3. Number of older people with increased knowledge and awareness of later life housing and care issues and options	34,000 older people will have received information from a 'pass it on' trainee and 15,000 accessed related self help materials	By the end of the project

Methodology

This evaluation draws upon:

- **Quantitative information**
 - Output data collated from each of the local projects' quarterly returns made during year 1 (14-15) and Yr 2 (15-16)
 - Analysis of records of workshops/talks events made in other localities across England outside the full project areas, including feedback form analysis
 - Website download data
- **Qualitative information** - including:
 - Examination of a sample of feedback forms for additional written comments
 - Group interviews with volunteers in one locality
 - A focus group with volunteers in a second locality
 - Face to face and telephone interviews with older people who have been supported by a Silverlinks volunteer in four localities
 - A round table discussion with the national Older People's Housing Champions Group

Quantitative information

- **Local project output data**

Each local project makes quarterly returns to Care & Repair England including reporting on:

- i) Number of older people supported by a volunteer and data about the characteristics of supported individuals.
- ii) Number of older people who take part in a workshop, information talk, event; outline details of the activity.
- iii) Completed feedback forms from older people involved in the project, taking part in workshops/talks/events. Reporting on quantitative monitoring is based on a percentage of responses.

- **Analysis of records of workshops/talks events**

Details of all Silverlinks workshops, talks and events that are delivered directly by Care & Repair England are recorded and delegate/participant feedback forms are collected and collated.

- **Website/Blog downloads data**

Visits and downloads of self help material are monitored on a regular basis and after specific activities eg after launch of a new product or particular event where materials have been promoted.

Qualitative information

This has primarily been based on listening to the views of older people who have in some way been involved with their local project, as well as views gathered across a wider geographical area through the national talks and workshops.

- **Examination of a sample of feedback forms**

A simple, short questionnaire is circulated at workshops/talks with space for additional written comments. Staff and volunteers who are delivering workshops/talks may also note verbal comments by participants.

For beneficiaries of one-to-one support, a more in depth form is completed which includes information about the individual's current living situation and any decision that they may have made about changes to their housing.

Average rate of return for all forms is 40%. For one-to-one advice beneficiaries, the return rate is lower at around 30% as many of these cases involve conversations with volunteers at outreach events and it is not always either practicable or appropriate to ask a beneficiary to complete a written form in certain situations.

- **Group interviews with volunteers in one locality**
- **A focus group with volunteers in a second locality**

Group interviews with volunteers were carried out with a focus group for four volunteers held in Bristol and two group interviews with two volunteers each in Nottingham. One of the Nottingham volunteers was previously a Silverlinks beneficiary, so this qualitative aspect of a transition from beneficiary to volunteer was covered during the main volunteer group interview. A total of eight volunteers were interviewed. The meetings were semi-structured utilising a key questions checklist. The conversations were recorded and later analysed.

- **Face to face and telephone interviews with older people who have been supported by a Silverlinks volunteer**

Local projects were asked to identify a sample of beneficiaries who were willing to talk confidentially to Care & Repair England's Silverlinks programme co-ordinator about their experience in being supported by a Silverlinks volunteer. This resulted in 11 older people being identified from the projects in Nottinghamshire, Northumberland, Wigan and West Cumbria. There were logistical difficulties in arranging some of the interviews, so in the end a sample of six beneficiaries were interviewed by the beneficiaries' preferred method - four by telephone and one via a detailed email exchange, and one face-to-face. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted using a key questions checklist, but with many open questions to enable interviewees to talk about what was of most importance to them.

- **A round table discussion with the National Older People's Housing Champions Group**

There are ongoing discussions about the progress of Silverlinks at the regular meetings of the National Older Person's Housing Champions Group. As part of this evaluation the group had a more in depth discussion at their summer 2016 meeting (again semi-structured with reference to a checklist of key questions) to reflect on the project so far and areas to focus on in future.

Findings: Quantitative

To date virtually all of the output targets are being surpassed, with the only one not met being the number of self help information downloads from the blog/ website.

Outcome 1: Older people involved with the project feel better able and prepared to manage life changing transitions, particularly with regard to their housing and living situations

INDICATOR	INDICATOR LEVEL FOR YEARS 1 & 2	OUTCOME FOR YEARS 1 & 2
1. Number of older people taking part in project activities who report improved ability to plan for and manage changes to their housing and care situations	1,365 older people take part in project activities (4yr target=3,555) 75% report improved ability after contact with project/activity	2,494 older people directly involved in project activities. 85% report improved ability to plan ahead, 92% improved knowledge of where to go for info & advice
2. Number of vulnerable older people linked to older volunteers who feel more in control and better able to manage their housing and living situations	480 older people facing housing and related care life crises eg moving home, installing home adaptations and/or finding carers, will have talked to and been supported by another older person with related personal experience (4yr target =1,360)	548 older people supported by Silverlinks volunteers 16,008 received information via 'pass it on'
3. Number of older people with increased knowledge and awareness of later life housing and care issues and options	11,000* older people will have received information via 'pass it on' 5,000* accessed related self help (online) materials *third of 4 year totals (34,000 & 15,000) based in expectation of cumulative effect	1,544 downloaded self help information

Indicator 1: Number of older people taking part in project activities*¹ who report improved ability to plan for and manage changes to their housing and care situations

In the first two years, 2,494 older people have been directly involved in various project activities, exceeding the two year target of 1,365 by 1,129 (83%).

85% of respondents to the surveys*² of volunteers, one to one beneficiaries and workshop/event delegates say they are now in a better position to plan ahead, and 92% have a better idea of where to go for information and advice.

This exceeds the target of 75% of older people taking part in project activities reporting improved ability to plan for and manage changes to their housing and care situations.

The project is so far exceeding expectations in terms of numbers of people involved and in the proportion of people reporting that they feel better able to plan ahead. A particular achievement is the proportion of people who have a better idea of where to go for information and advice as a result of their involvement.

*1 This includes volunteers, those who have received one-to-one support, and those that have attended training and workshops.

*2 Average response rate overall is 83%

Indicator 2: Number of vulnerable*³ older people linked to older volunteers who feel more in control and better able to manage their housing and living situations

Outcomes and Outputs

To the end of year two, Silverlinks volunteers have supported 548 older people who are facing decisions about their housing or care, such as deciding whether to move home, install adaptations and/or find carers thereby enabling them to better manage their housing and living situations.

This exceeds the two year output target of 480 by 148 (31%).

The vast majority of beneficiaries (83%) reported feeling more in control and better able to make decisions about their housing and living situations after their contact with Silverlinks volunteers. 93% said they know more about their housing and care options, and 98% said they now know where to go for information, advice and practical support.

● Main types of housing & care issues raised with Silverlinks volunteers

The feedback forms from beneficiaries reflect a wide range of issues being discussed with Silverlinks volunteers including;

- *home adaptations*
- *home repairs*
- *pros and cons of moving home*
- *advice about possible care options*
- *advice about possible alternative housing options*

Some of the main reasons why people were considering their living situation included;

- *Feeling isolated or moving closer to family and/or friends (12%)*
- *Feeling worried about managing the home, including repairs (16%)*
- *Increasing or onset of disability or illness (22%)*
- *Considering whether they should move (30%)*
- *Not knowing where to go for information and advice about their living situation (69%)*

Very often these factors are so intertwined that nearly all were indicated as being a factor in consideration of future housing, with many people stating two or more reasons.

As a result of talking to a volunteer many older people made a decision or took action. Although there were only a few responses to this question on the feedback forms, many people chose more than one – eg they had decided to stay and have adaptations or repairs. The reason for the low response rate is that for many people it was too early to make a decision in terms of moving or staying put, and they needed time to digest the information and think about what was the right decision for them.

25% had adaptations to their home

30% had other repairs or improvements

40% decided to stay in their current home (including those that had adaptations or repairs)

42% decided to move

Characteristics of Older People taking part in Project Activities

Gender

The majority (70%) of older people who have been linked to a Silverlinks volunteer are female.

Other characteristics of respondent beneficiaries:

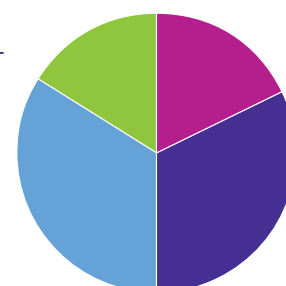
Age

Half of beneficiaries (both male and female) are 75yrs and over, with a significant proportion 85yrs and over (16% women, 11% of men)

AGE OF RESPONDENT BENEFICIARIES

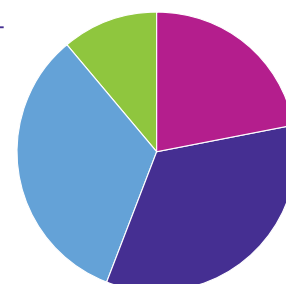
Women

- 50-64yrs = 18%
- 65-74 yrs = 32%
- 75-84 yrs = 34%
- 85 yrs or more 16%



Men

- 50-64yrs = 22%
- 65-74 yrs = 34%
- 75-84 yrs = 33%
- 85 yrs or more 11%



*3 The term 'vulnerable' is not tightly defined by Big Lottery conditions for the grant programme, but we have included people who are 'older old' (75/85yrs +), live alone and/or have long term illness, disability or health problem.

Live alone

60% of female and 42% of male beneficiaries reported that they live alone.

Health

70% of respondents have a long term illness, disability or health problem.

Ethnicity

96% were white British, with only 4% from other ethnic groups. This reflects the demographic of some of the project locations which are in sparsely populated, largely rural areas with low numbers of ethnic diversity (Northumberland, Cornwall, West Cumbria and parts of Nottinghamshire).

Tenure

The majority (67%) of older beneficiaries live in owner occupied accommodation (21% social rented, 9% private rented, 3% other).

About the Volunteers

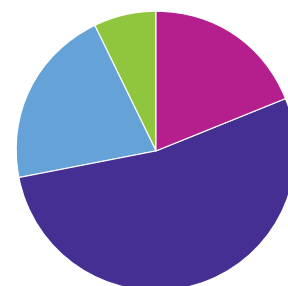
The Silverlinks volunteers tend to be younger than the beneficiaries, with fewer in the over 85 age group (7% of women, 0% men) and the majority being under 75 (72% of women, 80% of men).

The majority of volunteers are women (81%). This is not entirely unexpected as men are generally underrepresented within volunteering in general. A lower proportion of volunteers than beneficiaries have long term health conditions or disabilities (45% vs 70%). This is likely to reflect that a number of volunteers are recently retired, generally “younger old” and still fairly active.

AGE OF VOLUNTEERS

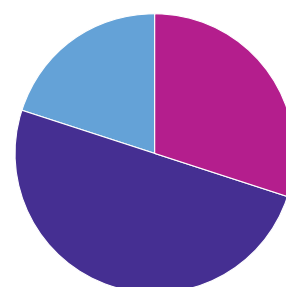
Women

- 50-64yrs = 19 %
- 65-74 yrs = 53 %
- 75-84 yrs = 21 %
- 85 yrs or more 7%



Men

- 50-64yrs = 30%
- 65-74 yrs = 50%
- 75-84 yrs = 20%
- 85 yrs or more 0%



Live alone

57% of female and 40% of male volunteers live alone

Health

45% of volunteers have a long term illness, disability or health problem.

Ethnicity

85% were white British, with a higher representation of other ethnic groups than beneficiaries. 11% of volunteers were Black African or Caribbean, and 4% of mixed ethnic background.

Tenure

The majority (80%) of volunteers live in owner occupied accommodation (8.5% social rented, 8.5% private rented/ 3% other). This is a higher rate of owner occupation than for beneficiaries (67%).

Indicator 3: Number of older people with increased knowledge and awareness of later life housing and care issues and options

In the first two years 16,008 people received information via 'pass it on' workshops exceeding the two year target of 11,000 by 5,008 (46%)

The workshops and talks are very well received by groups and are carried out by both paid staff (mainly the detailed workshops) and volunteers (mainly group talks). All participants in workshops and events are specifically asked to pass on a minimum of brochures/information packs & leaflets to other older people through their social networks and also to talk to people about what they have learned. Based on experience to date we continue to use the estimate of ten people for each older person that receives information from a Silverlinks talk or volunteer but in many cases people are taking larger volumes of information to circulate eg through church/faith groups, community groups, clubs and centres.

Again the majority of older people receiving information were female (74%), with 25% being female homeowners living alone. 59% of all women responding to the surveys had a long term health issue.

In the first two years self help information has been developed, tested with older people and subsequently revised, resulting in the launch of the interactive housing options 'workbook' in year two. The self help information has been downloaded from the blog/website on 1,544 occasions compared with a 4 year target of 15,000 downloads.

This is the only target that has not been met or surpassed in the first two years of the programme. This may be because older people, particularly the 'older old' and disadvantaged groups are still far more likely than virtually any other cohort to be digitally excluded, and it does reflect the regular front line feedback/complaint from workshops and talks that 'everything is online now' and highlights the extent to which an information gap is opening up between the generations.

Findings: Qualitative

The views of Silverlinks volunteers

Every one of the local volunteers that took part in the evaluation interviews reported that they gain considerable satisfaction from helping others, particularly when they help other people avoid pitfalls that they have experienced.

One volunteer said:



“I downsized five years ago and I wish I’d known about (Silverlinks agency) then”


The volunteers involved in the evaluation told us that they enjoy talking to people – both the older people they meet and other volunteers – and many have made friendships through volunteering.

Volunteers also reported that they find satisfaction from “giving back” to an organisation that has previously helped them. For others the satisfaction is a sense of purpose, feeling “useful” and continuing to make a valuable contribution to society.

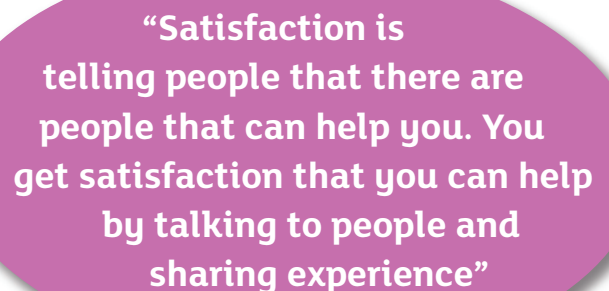
Many Silverlinks volunteers became involved in the initiative because they had received help through a service offered by the local agency. This transition from beneficiary to volunteer was an integral part of the Silverlinks model, based on the belief that the personal experience of those who had already received help from the local agency could be drawn upon and would be directly beneficial to others. It is therefore particularly notable that the evaluation reveals this anticipated outcome has been realised. Volunteers clearly like to make a positive contribution and not just be a passive recipient of a service.

Many volunteers told us that as they have had help themselves both from the local agency and sometimes other services, they now know where to go if they need support, and they want to share this knowledge and personal recommendations with others.

Volunteers reported that they had personally gained satisfaction on several levels – from talking to new people, feeling “useful”, and feeling that they have ‘given back’, and from new friendships formed with other volunteers.



“It is reassuring to know that someone is available for advice... we didn’t know what was available... lots of people don’t realise what is available to them – it is important to share information”



“Satisfaction is telling people that there are people that can help you. You get satisfaction that you can help by talking to people and sharing experience”

The volunteers see the value in sharing information and support the approach of passing on information and sharing experiences.

“I do events and the stands at the hospital. There are lots of people there that speak to you individually. They like hearing what work you’ve had done (on your home). You talk to people and they then pass it on [to others]. They find it valuable to share experiences”

As there are many different activities and levels at which volunteers can be involved, and no specific regular time commitment is specified by any of the projects, this gives flexibility in terms of who can be involved and how they contribute. For example, one volunteer has health issues which means she is unable to leave the house on some days, but is able to support individuals by phone as well as write. She has shared her personal experiences of moving home in later life by writing for the Silverlinks blog throughout the duration of the process of moving home.

When asked about why the Silverlinks approach works for them, volunteers said that they feel that being an older person who has gone through similar experiences means that people find them much easier to approach. The informal nature of the support results in older people who may not necessarily approach a professional being happy to talk to a volunteer:

“An older volunteer is a face (older) people can relate to”

Volunteers that are involved in other projects also use their contacts to pass on information and feel that they are approached because they are trusted within their community (eg within a church, faith group or a specific minority ethnic community). As such, this outreach work means that the “Pass it On” model has been extended and many of the volunteers share Silverlinks and housing information at other groups that they attend or are members of.



National Older People's Housing Champions Network

The National Older People's Housing Champions Group is made up of older people from each region of England who champion older people's housing issues in that area. The Champions Group is the reference group for Silverlinks, regularly reviewing progress and providing a sounding board for ideas and development. Many of the members of the group have taken part in activities, have links to local partners and/or have facilitated setting up local workshops or talks.

In a semi-structured discussion the Housing Champions group reflected on the progress of the Silverlinks programme so far and made suggestions for further development. The feedback from the group members is summarised here:

- Silverlinks has had positive outcomes for both the older volunteers, and the older people supported by volunteers.
- Volunteers are able to pass on information, but there is a need for good back up detailed advice, probably via a local housing options service and services that can give practical housing support.
- Silverlinks is not 'instead' of professional advice but is a complementary role.
- Sometimes there is more trust if someone can talk to a person who has been in the same position, particularly if they have dealt with it positively.
- Whilst volunteers may not necessarily be impartial about the options, their opinion and advice is valid as they have lived through similar experiences.
- Volunteers have a crucial role in promoting the work/services of local agencies and also in outreach to more isolated people.
- Future local programmes will work best where there are specialist housing advisers in place.
- Targeted use of resources and volunteers could lead to organisational savings.
- Care should be taken to ensure that volunteers are recruited from a variety of backgrounds and ethnic groups to ensure that the programme is accessible to as many people as possible including traditionally "hard to reach" groups and communities.

Impact on local partner organisations

Local agencies delivering Silverlinks, as mentioned above, have done so in different ways. It has been observed that those that have not worked with volunteers before have taken longer to set up and deliver the project initially. In one case, an organisation that had not worked with volunteers before found it quite difficult to integrate the project within the organisation. Workers were concerned as they did not fully understand the Silverlinks volunteer role of providing a listening ear and signposting to services and being complementary to the professional staff. They were worried that the volunteer role overlapped with their paid role. There was also concern that a volunteer may attempt to give advice beyond the scope of the volunteer role. This was overcome by good volunteer and worker joint training which both clarified roles, built skills and cemented working relationships.

One organisation now manages another volunteer programme based on the Silverlinks model ie peer support. They had not previously worked with volunteers.

In some cases, the Silverlinks work has been integrated with different services offered by the agency – such as a generalist Information & Advice Helpline or Housing Options services. These both work well and are a good way of ensuring cross referrals to both services and increasing the chances of sustainability for the more comprehensive service.

Because of the nature of Silverlinks, it is difficult to see how it would work in an area without even a limited Housing Options information and advice service that can back up the volunteers and provide a casework service for older people who need help with more complex situations.

Impact on Older People

Individual Illustrations

The following are examples of people who have been supported by Silverlinks volunteers and who were interviewed as part of the evaluation.



Kathleen & George

This example illustrates how independence can be extended for a time through carrying out home adaptations, but circumstances evolve and some people reach a limit as to what can be done in their current home and need to move.

Kathleen is 59 and lives with her husband George, 61, in a three-bedroom house, where they have been for 30 years. They both have worsening health issues which affect their mobility and their ability to manage at home. Their daughter helps with larger jobs such as decorating or mowing the lawn, but they are finding day-to-day tasks increasingly difficult.

"We have had a lot of different crises since 2009 but the sudden health decline in George has hit us hardest. We didn't know which way to turn. The house we own is on a hill with ten concrete steps to the front door and a long cobbled alleyway to the rear. Accessing the house became a major issue and there were associated problems such as George not being able to get to the only toilet which was upstairs. We were both finding it hard to get up to the third and largest bedroom in the loft. George was in danger of becoming housebound in the winter."

Kathleen and George had already paid for some adaptations to their home – such as installing a walk-in shower - which had helped them manage for some years, but had now come to the conclusion that they needed to move.

They sought some advice but found it overwhelming and confusing until they contacted [the local Silverlinks project agency]. The housing options worker (Jane) and Silverlinks volunteer (Daisy) visited the couple to talk through their situation, giving them information and advice about their realistic possible housing options and then support through the decision making process and eventually with the move.

"(Jane and Daisy) have helped via home visits, email and me calling in... they helped us fill in forms (for sheltered housing) and gave us general advice as well as the emotional support we needed. The practical help and advice on how to go about relocating and covering other possible options was also discussed".

As a result, Kathleen and George were able to move to a bungalow in a sheltered housing scheme, where access is easier and Kathleen has the security of a pull chord in each room, so she can leave George alone in the house without worry. She said,

"I don't quite know what I would've done if Jane and Daisy had not been the catalyst for this change. It would have not been nice. George instantly feels more in control and happier".

Benefits to NHS / Public Health:

- better management of long term health conditions
- reducing risk of hospital admission/readmission
- faster, safe hospital discharge (should either have to be admitted)
- falls risk reduction

Benefits to Social Care;

- improved wellbeing
- enabled safer independent living
- avoidance/delay of care home admission
- enabling best use of personal resources
- reduced isolation
- benefits to carer
- greater choice and control



Evelyn

This example illustrates that life transitions continue over time. It shows the importance of home location and social networks, and how the Silverlinks model offers an ongoing solution that can respond to changing and evolving personal circumstances.

Evelyn is 83 and lives in a three-storey, four-bedroom Victorian house that she shared throughout their marriage with her husband of 54 years, until his death four years ago. Evelyn felt at a loss to manage the house on her own, which was cold, unsafe and needed some urgent repairs. There were also a lot of possessions and mounting paperwork which impeded access around the home and was a fire risk, as well as causing anxiety and worry. Evelyn had also been experiencing a decline in her own health, with decreasing mobility - she had had several falls in the home.

A Silverlinks volunteer, (Rose), visited Evelyn and talked with her about her situation. The thought of moving was too much for Evelyn to even contemplate, so (Rose) asked the Housing Options Adviser to visit to discuss other possible solutions for Evelyn. As a result of this meeting, Evelyn was referred to several services offered by [the Silverlinks agency], including accessing a grant to help with several urgent repairs to the roof, kitchen, bathroom and central heating system.

A level access shower was installed and an emergency personal alarm system put in. Evelyn also accepted help in de-cluttering her home, for which (Rose) provided emotional and practical support.

Evelyn decided to stay in her home as she has good friends and neighbours nearby. She has fond memories of the home she shared with her husband. She is also very worried that if she moves, she will not be able to take her dog. The changes to the home helped her to continue to live in her home independently, safely and well.

However Evelyn's health continues to decline, and she is starting to think again about the possibility of moving.

She says,

"It is reassuring to know that someone is available for advice... I didn't know what was available".

Although the thought of moving is quite overwhelming for Evelyn, she now knows where to go for advice and support if and when she needs it.

Evelyn is also now a Silverlinks volunteer, she and (Rose) regularly volunteer together, going to talks and presentations to share their experiences. They find that people like the informality of speaking to older people who have faced similar housing difficulties, and that they are often able to give people advice and information that may not otherwise have known where to access support. They said:

"people have said it has been very helpful... some elderly people don't know what help's out there".

Benefits to NHS / Public Health:

- falls risk reduction
- reduced risk of hospital admission/readmission
- faster, safe hospital discharge (should she have to be admitted)

Benefits to Social Care:

- improved wellbeing
- enabled safer independent living
- avoidance/delay of care home admission
- enabling best use of personal resources
- reduced isolation
- greater choice and control

(All names of people have been changed)



Clive

This example illustrates that as well as practical reasons, there are other reasons why our home may not suit us and why making changes can feel overwhelming. It also shows how a Silverlinks volunteer can complement an existing general information and advice service.

Clive is a homeowner who has lived alone (in the North of England) since his wife died several years ago. He suffers from osteoarthritis, and wishes to downsize. He also feels isolated and wants to be closer to his son and his family who live in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Clive contacted a national advice line and was put in touch with a Silverlinks volunteer, Lily, who he then came in to meet up with in the (Silverlinks project centre). They talked through Clive's situation and possible options, and although he had already decided that he wanted to move closer to his family, he was struggling to know how to make this happen, particularly as there was not enough equity in his current home to purchase a property in Stratford - upon-Avon.

Lily helped Clive to fill in the forms to apply for social housing and advised him what he would need to provide in terms of financial and medical documents. He is now waiting to sell his home and has been given a gold band priority for social housing in Stratford.

Although there are still many uncertainties, and Clive still feels worried about the move, knowing that he will be closer to his family is reassuring and he feels much more in control of his situation. He described being supported by a Silverlinks volunteer as:

| *“just great”*

Benefits to NHS / Public Health:

- reduced risk of hospital admission/readmission
- faster, safe hospital discharge (should he have to be admitted)
- better management of long term health condition

Benefits to Social Care:

- improved wellbeing
- enabled safer independent living
- avoidance/delay of care home admission
- enabling best use of personal resources
- reduced isolation
- greater choice and control

(All names of people have been changed)

John

This example illustrates how simple adaptations can make a difference to people's independence. It shows that although people think moving may be the only option, there are other solutions available which can be preferable for the individual.

John and his wife Judy are recently retired and they live in a 3 bedroom semi-detached home which they own. It was a new build home when they bought it over 35 years ago. John had a fall a few months ago and has since been having mobility problems, including being unable to get in and out of the bath. Although he can have a shower, he is only able to do this with difficulty and requires help from his wife as it still involves stepping into the bath.

John and his wife visited (the Silverlinks project agency) to ask about alternative housing options. A Silverlinks volunteer visited them at home to talk through their situation. They did not really want to move home, and so the volunteer discussed alternative housing options, including possible adaptations, with them.

Following the visit, (the Silverlinks project agency) arranged for a specialist to fit handrails in the bathroom. This small change is enough to enable John to use the bath with much less difficulty and more safely. John said,

"I was absolutely happy with the service received, and if I need any more adaptations or information, I know where to go"



Benefits to NHS / Public Health:

- falls risk reduction
- reduced risk of hospital admission/readmission
- faster, safe hospital discharge (should he have to be admitted)

Benefits to Social Care:

- improved wellbeing
- enabled safer independent living
- avoidance/delay of care home admission
- enabling best use of personal resources
- benefit to carer
- greater choice and control

(All names of people have been changed)

The Wider Benefits

The wider intended benefits of the model are threefold;

- i) to benefit individual older people who need information, advice and support;*
- ii) to benefit older people who volunteer*
- ii) to benefit organisations working with older people in related fields which apply the model*

Benefits to older people

- Older people at talks, events and during interviews told us they are more comfortable talking to other older people who have been through a similar situation as they understand the practical and emotional ramifications of particular housing situations and experiences. The volunteer can relate to their situation, as they are of similar age/have had similar experiences.
- Older people told us that they sometimes perceive that a relative or professional has a view on what the older person “should” do - and that they sometimes feel under pressure to make that decision rather than being allowed time to reach their own conclusion. The older volunteers have no agenda - they share their own experiences but are not there to persuade anybody to make a particular choice. A volunteer can allow space for the person to talk through options and reach the decision that’s right for them without feeling under pressure.
- There is also the issue of waiting times for professional services. As one older person pointed out, he was able to speak to a Silverlinks volunteer quickly but would have had to wait several weeks for an appointment with a specialist housing options caseworker.

Benefits to volunteers

- There are many studies which report benefits of volunteering, including a recent report which highlighted a particularly strong evidence base for the health benefits of volunteering by older people.

- Reported gains in this evaluation included reports of a sense of satisfaction from helping or supporting others, a sense of “giving back” after being a beneficiary and of generally feeling useful.
- In particular for older volunteers, getting out and about, talking to others, and making new friends are seen as key benefits.
- Volunteers also said they benefitted personally from learning more about services that were available to them and where to go if they needed information or support.

Feedback from volunteers

“Silverlinks is needed to help older people to know the information to enable them to make decisions. Personally Silverlinks has taught me such a lot and given me a confidence to bring awareness to older people I meet at groups, activities and in everyday life”

“I’m really enjoying volunteering (for Silverlinks). It gives me an opportunity to get out and about and I love the fact that I’m letting other older people know the services as well as for myself and my friends in the process. I really think Silverlinks is a valuable service”

“I’m so grateful that I’ve been given the opportunity to volunteer (for Silverlinks) and feel proud of myself for being able to share my experience with others. I’m enjoying manning the stand now and going to talks. I’ve gained such a lot of information”

Benefits to organisations

For the local organisations that deliver Silverlinks, there are several intended benefits of using this model.

- Working with volunteers enables far more older people to be reached in terms of distributing self help and awareness raising information eg through the volunteers who give talks to older people's groups, talk to people at events or give information to people they meet in everyday life.
- This can especially be the case in "hard-to-reach" communities, such as within specific minority ethnic groups, where a trusted community activist can have a significant impact in terms of raising awareness and 'validating' services on offer.
- Volunteer roles are complementary to those of front-line paid staff and volunteers are able to provide additional (time consuming) support and services – such as accompanying someone to view alternative housing – which the caseworkers do not have the time to offer.
- The Silverlinks model can also assist with reducing/ streamlining caseloads, although care has to be taken not to blur the lines between casework and the volunteering role. For example if someone contacts an HIA as they are struggling to cope in the home, a volunteer can talk with the person and help them reach their decision ie moving or staying put. At this point the volunteer refers the older person to the relevant caseworker within the HIA to provide the practical assistance eg arranging repairs or adaptations or moving. This saves the caseworker time as the client only comes to them when they are at a point of action.

"volunteering is invaluable.... because of resources and people bring expertise from their previous experience"

(Silverlinks Volunteer)

- Finally, volunteers provide a critical role in outreach, passing on basic information and signposting. Volunteers told us that they think many older people are more likely to approach another older person (eg at a stand in a medical centre) rather than a younger professional, thereby removing barriers to accessing of services.

Local illustration:
Age UK Northumberland

At Age UK Northumberland, Silverlinks volunteer activities complement those of paid advice workers. For example, Silverlinks volunteers are able to take the time to help older people fill in forms for social housing and can make sure that applicants have the right documentation ready to submit when applying for sheltered accommodation.

Local illustration:
Nottinghamshire

Having delivered a Silverlinks project since 2014, Age UK Nottinghamshire decided to tie in Silverlinks more closely with their housing options service. The Housing Options Adviser also manages the Silverlinks project, and is able to match volunteers with older people who need support and provide a wider range of practical housing assistance as and when needed.

Local illustration:
West of England Care & Repair

West of England Care & Repair (WECR) in Bristol report that having worked successfully with Silverlinks volunteers for a number of years, volunteers are now working in other areas of the organisation and there has been a gradual cultural shift. WECR have also used aspects of the Silverlinks model to set up another peer support project for older people, including focussing on new ways of working with older people with hoarding issues. The organisation is also looking to complement the housing options caseworker service in the wider geographical area they now cover by replicating the Silverlinks model, working with volunteers who are able to provide basic information signposting and support.



Conclusions

Overview

The Silverlinks project is revealing a great demand for information about housing and care options in later life amongst a spectrum of older people from all ages and social groups.

The high level of change achieved as a result of taking part in some aspects of Silverlinks with regard to improved ability to plan for and manage changes to housing and care situations is surpassing expectations, and so the basic model of information & knowledge transfer is working well.

Amongst the Silverlinks volunteers there is a huge willingness and desire to share experience and 'spread the word'. In addition, there is evidence of significant personal benefits arising from this volunteering.

Cost savings to the state is not a set objective for this project. However, the findings emerging from the individuals who were interviewed as part of this evaluation do illustrate the clear potential benefits to the NHS and Social Care, as well as to individuals, and are in line with other reports, particularly of the EAC FirstStop programme, which developed a methodology to quantify such gains.

Housing and care options information and advice is a scarce but highly valued resource. It is clear from the evaluation that the Silverlinks model can help to increase the capacity of such provision by enabling older volunteers to play a complementary role working alongside skilled professional advisers.

What is working well

- Spreading of information by older people to their peers through participation in workshops, events and talks is working particularly well. Older people interviewed report that they like to share information with others, particularly if they feel they are helping someone. There is also a progression for some individuals, who start by attending a talk, go on to take part in a workshop, receive support from a Silverlinks volunteer and a service from the local agency, then sometimes become a volunteer themselves.
- Working with, and not just for, older people helps organisations in reaching larger numbers of potential

beneficiaries, including many who would not ordinarily approach a professional for advice.

- One to one support, where an older person facing a housing dilemma is matched with a Silverlinks volunteer is also working well. Beneficiaries reported feeling more comfortable talking to a person who is of a similar age to themselves and who has a shared experience.
- Reaching older homeowners has been particularly successful, with 67% of all respondents being homeowners. In particular, older females (72% of people involved in the project) that live alone (58%) have been well represented.
- Service capacity can be expanded where Silverlinks volunteers are undertaking a complementary role to professional staff, such as allowing older people more time to talk through a dilemma over an extended period of time, helping with filling in forms or accompanying someone to visit alternative housing. This sharing of tasks can help to free up caseworker time for more complex cases where more intensive intervention and professional knowledge is needed.
- There are potential efficiency gains arising from the mix of a national/local advice provision working alongside older volunteers who raise awareness of the availability of both sources of information and advice. It enables older people with greater capacity/personal resources to help themselves through accessing information, including on-line, and allows the local front line staff to focus more time and effort on those with a greater need for one to one/practical support.

Areas for development

- For agencies where working with volunteers is new, the Silverlinks project has taken longer to establish. In particular for those staff not used to working with volunteers, embedding internal cross referral systems for possible Silverlinks connections takes some time.
- The model has been more successfully integrated into current services where there is not only a culture of working with older volunteers, but also where there is a Housing Options Information & Advice service already operating.

- Agencies have had to be careful to think through and be clear about the role of the volunteers vs the role of paid advice and caseworker staff. The volunteers offer a complementary role and are not there to offer in depth advice, advocacy or deal with complex cases.
- The role of volunteers in workshops and talks is emerging as particularly beneficial not only to individuals but also to agencies. The personal recommendation of the agencies' services by older people who have themselves been beneficiaries is a powerful endorsement. The local Silverlinks volunteers tend to be well connected with their local communities and they are well placed to arrange talks/events in their area.
- Whilst the ethnic mix of both beneficiaries and volunteers largely reflects the profiles of the local populations in individual localities, potentially more work needs to be done in ensuring that all minority communities and older people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds are reached via the programme.
- It is more challenging and takes more time and effort to promote Housing Options awareness raising workshops more widely in areas where there is no local provision of housing advice or practical housing services such as handyperson or home improvement agency. Nevertheless, when they take place the feedback is still very positive and in some instances is resulting in reaching out to older people living in areas where there is far less provision/voluntary sector activity, and hence may help to prompt local action by older people's action groups and forums to champion local improvements.

Influencing wider practice

This report has focussed primarily on the progress being made towards achievement of the main project outcome, which is the benefit to individual older people. However, a further two project outcomes focus on changes being made at national and local level, influencing organisations' ways of working. These are:

- Organisations who provide older people with housing and care advice or related services incorporate later life housing options awareness raising, volunteering and self help by older people, for older people, into their local delivery models.
- Organisations working with older people change their policies and practice to incorporate housing and care options information and advice related provision based on the evidence and learning from the Silverlinks programme.

A full evaluation will take place at the end of the programme in 2018 which will evaluate all three of the anticipated outcomes, including two that relate to promotion of the take up of the provision of the model by other providers and national organisations.

Whilst no systematic assessment of progress towards these outcomes has been carried out as part of this evaluation report, there is some indicative information about the extent to which Silverlinks has influenced other organisations.

A number of organisations (mainly HIAs and Age UKs) that had previously been supported with funding from EAC FirstStop to develop and deliver a Housing Options service in their locality have included elements of Silverlinks in their work. Indeed, for the final round of funding, EAC First Stop made including elements of Silverlinks an expectation for funding applications.

Indicative information from the previous EAC FirstStop local partners is that many of them have implemented elements of the Silverlinks model. Several of the organisations have also recognised that working with volunteers is an effective way to deliver a successful service and have begun Silverlinks projects alongside their Information & Advice or Housing Options services.

Future Vision

The forward vision for Silverlinks is that it will inspire organisations to work with, and not just for, older people.

The duties and requirements of the Care Act 2014, including the specific Guidance concerning integrated information and advice, provide a timely opportunity to review local provision in this important area of support which underpins wellbeing and enables people to make well informed major life decisions. A combination of a local Housing Options advice service working alongside older volunteers offers a cost effective model.

In the context of the integration of health, social care and housing, the Silverlinks examples of pro-actively delivering information and advice to patients within health sector settings, in GP surgeries, health centres and hospitals, is a particularly important development and one which has the potential for further expansion.

Appendix A: Local Project Descriptions

West of England (Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset)

West of England Care & Repair (WECR) have been running a Silverlinks project in Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset since October 2012. The Silverlinks volunteers are very active and carry out many different activities, including supporting older people who are thinking about moving or having adaptations or repairs to their home. They also visit older people's groups to do talks about housing in later life and share their own experience. The volunteers also like to attend various events and other local places such as churches, garden centres etc with the WECR stand, where they can talk to older people about their housing situation and can give out information about WECR services that are available to help them such as the handyman service.

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire

The Silverlinks initiative in Nottingham & Nottinghamshire is delivered by Age UK Notts, and covers both the city area and the County. The project is run alongside the Housing & Care Options Service, which provides information and advice to older people who are facing times of decision about their living situation.

A key feature of the Nottinghamshire project is the links with healthcare. The Silverlinks volunteers visit hospitals and medical centres to talk to people who may be experiencing issues around their housing, especially at times of crisis such as a stay in hospital or the onset of a disability or illness.

Northumberland

Silverlinks has been delivered by Age UK Northumberland since 2014. It is run alongside the Information & Advice telephone line and most Silverlinks beneficiaries are people who have contacted the advice line and then been put in touch with a Silverlinks volunteer (some of whom also volunteer on the advice line). The Housing & Social Care Options Adviser provides additional information & advice if needed. Due to the geography of the area, the volunteers are each focussed on a particular geographical area or local town within the county.

A feature of the project in Northumberland is the conferences for older people that are held across the region. Older people are able to come along and see what services are available for them in the area, in terms of their housing and care

Wigan

Age UK Wigan Borough delivers Silverlinks projects alongside their Housing Options Service. The Housing Options Adviser, advises older people on their housing options. She works with older volunteers who are able to provide information and advice to other older people and help them to talk through their decisions based on their own experience. The overall housing options/Silverlinks service is also part-funded by the local council, as the value of such a service is widely recognised.

Cornwall

Silverlinks in Cornwall is delivered by Cornwall Council, within their Home Solutions Team. The Home Solutions service gives information and advice to those people who have issues with their housing, and Silverlinks provides an additional dimension to this service helping to support older people who are facing times of crisis. The team also give talks and information sessions to older people, eg older people's groups or at medical centres. This ensures that older people have information about possible housing options and are able to think ahead about their options before they reach a time of crisis, knowing where to go for information and advice when they need it.

West Cumbria

Silverlinks in West Cumbria began in April 2016. It is being delivered by Age UK West Cumbria, and run alongside the housing options service. Volunteers across the locality are able to provide information & support for people who are facing decisions about their housing. The service is run alongside the established Housing Options service provided by Age UK West Cumbria.

Preston

The Silverlinks initiative in Preston also began in April 2016 and is delivered by Preston Care & Repair. As well as Preston, the project covers South Ribble, West Lancs and Chorley. The volunteers provide peer support for older people and are able to refer them to other services offered by Preston Care & Repair such as the Handyman service, Home Repairs and Improvements or the Housing Options service for in-depth practical support.

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