

Gloucestershire
Village &
Community
Agents

Annual report

July 2009 - June
2010

Providing older people with
easier access to services and
information

Report produced by Gloucestershire Rural
Community Council

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1.0 VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY AGENTS – AN OVERVIEW

The Village Agents Project began as a pilot scheme funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (LinkAge Plus) in 2006 with the aim of providing older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to information and services. In June 2008 Gloucestershire Village Agents were mainstreamed as a service, with funding jointly provided by NHS Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire County Council.



Community Agents, to work with the black and minority ethnic communities across Gloucestershire, were introduced initially as a six month pilot funded entirely by the County Council in January 2008. A second pilot project, targeted at more urban areas of the county, is running from March until August 2010.

The successful partnership between Gloucestershire County Council, NHS Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) continues with the Village Agents being employed and managed by GRCC.

GRCC, established in 1923, enables sustainable community development and empowers community groups not only through its project work but also through its team of district based rural advisers, who offer general advice and support to rural communities on community and parish planning, funding, capacity building, project development and management.

We also have a wide range of other partnership organisations involved in training and support, include Gloucestershire Constabulary, Fire & Rescue, Severn Wye Energy Agency, Care and Repair/Anchor Staying Put, Age UK, NHS Gloucestershire, District and Borough Councils, Community and Adult Care Directorate, the Library Service, local churches, parish councils, the Pension Service, and many more.

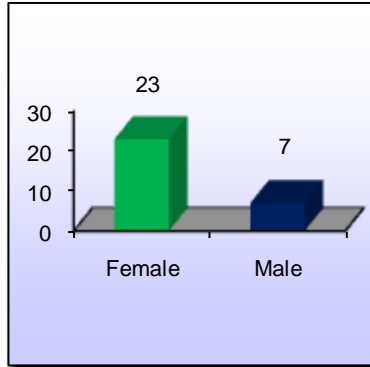
Village and Community Agents bridge the gap between the local community and those statutory and voluntary organisations able to offer help or support where required. Working in 'clusters' of rural communities, Village Agents act as facilitators in the provision of high quality information, promote access to a wide range of services, and identify unmet need within their community. The Community Agents perform a similar role but without the geographical restriction to particular parishes.

The service is primarily offered to older people, but other disadvantaged and isolated people are also able to receive Agent support. Village and Community Agents are CRB checked so they are in a position to visit older people both in their own homes and by running surgeries in suitable locations such as village halls, doctors' surgeries, etc. Attendance at luncheon clubs and coffee mornings also increases their visibility and cements their position at the heart of their communities as a familiar and trusted figure. Equipped with a laptop and mobile phone, they can access information easily for their client base.

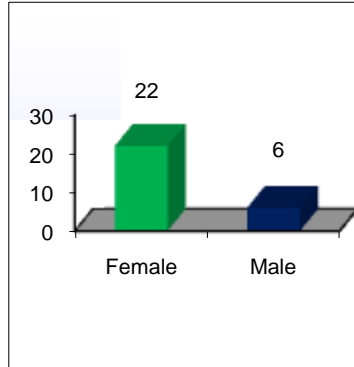
2.0 THE DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE END YEAR 4

The Village Agents come from a variety of backgrounds and range in age from 34 to 70. It remains a post which is of particular appeal to female applicants – only six out of the 28 Village Agents are male, all five BME Community Agents are female, and only one out of the five urban Community Agents is a man.

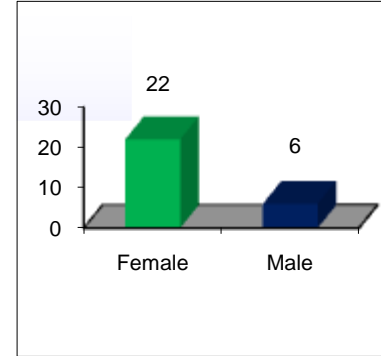
2006 – Village Agents



2008 – Village Agents

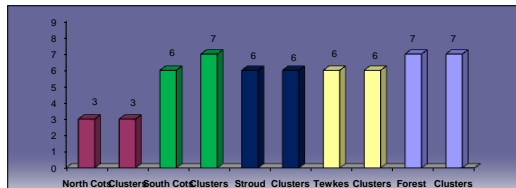


2010 – Village Agents

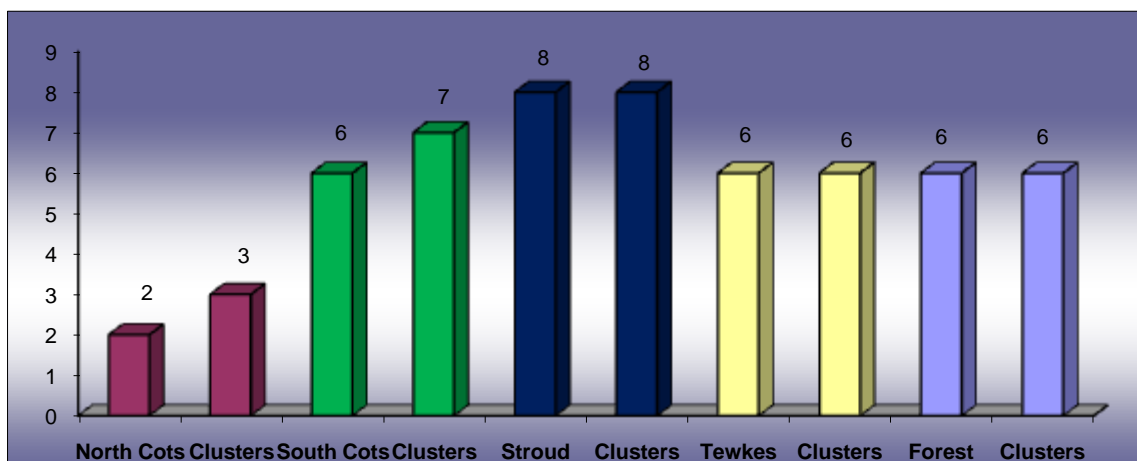


2.1 SPREAD OF VILLAGE AGENTS BY DISTRICT

The chart below shows the number of Village Agents per district and the number of clusters of parishes to date (July 2010). In the South Cotswolds six Village Agents work in seven areas. The first column in each district denotes the number of Agents in the area, the second is the number of clusters.

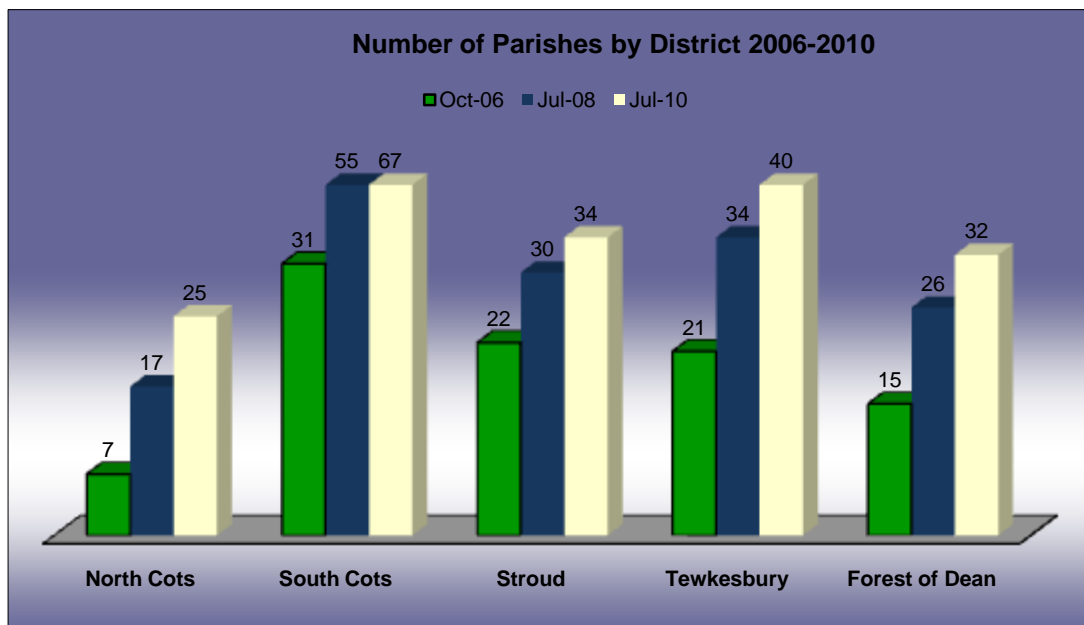


For comparison, the chart below shows the position at the end of the pilot project in 2008.



2.2 SPREAD OF PARISHES COVERED BY VILLAGE AGENTS

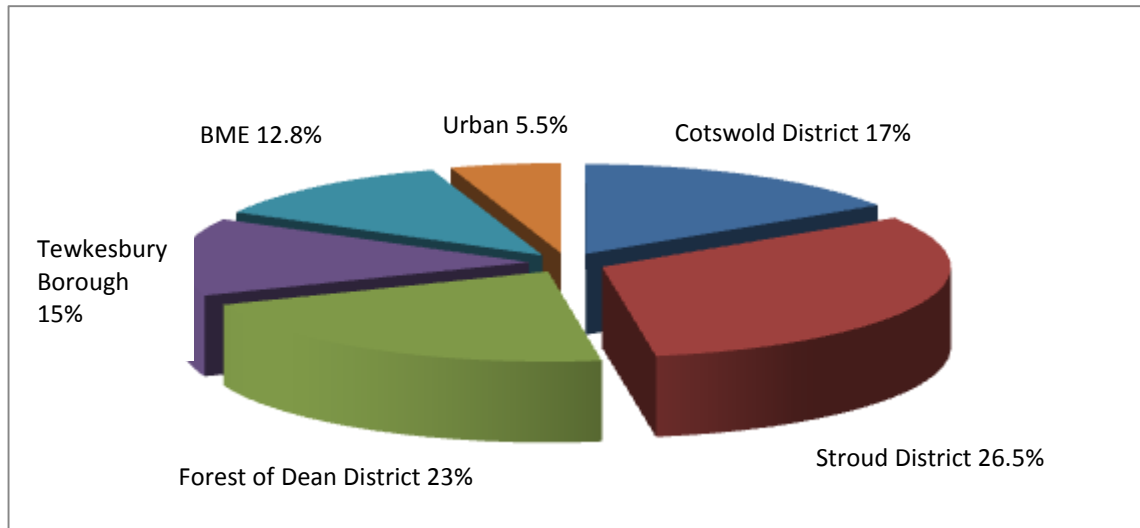
- In 2006 when the project began, Village Agents worked in 96 parishes of the 253 rural Gloucestershire. By the end of the pilot in 2008 this had grown to 162 parishes. At the end of Year Four in July 2010 the number officially stands at 204.
- The parishes were originally mapped by analysing existing services available, transport links, and areas of deprivation. As the scheme progressed, new parishes were added on recommendations from both Agents and agencies.
- The chart below shows how the scheme has grown since the pilot stage.
- Requests are still received from parishes not currently covered by one of the Village Agents clusters to be included in the scheme, however the scheme is currently at capacity so this is unlikely to happen in the short term.



3.0 REFERRALS AND DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

After each visit a Village or Community Agent makes, they are required to fill in an online referral, or 'gateway' form. The form collects demographic data, the nature of the problem, and other information relevant to any follow up visit. The gateway form is then submitted to the required agency by the Agent for the query to be addressed.

3,593 gateways were submitted in year 4. A percentage breakdown for year 4 (July 2009 – June 2010) by district is shown below.



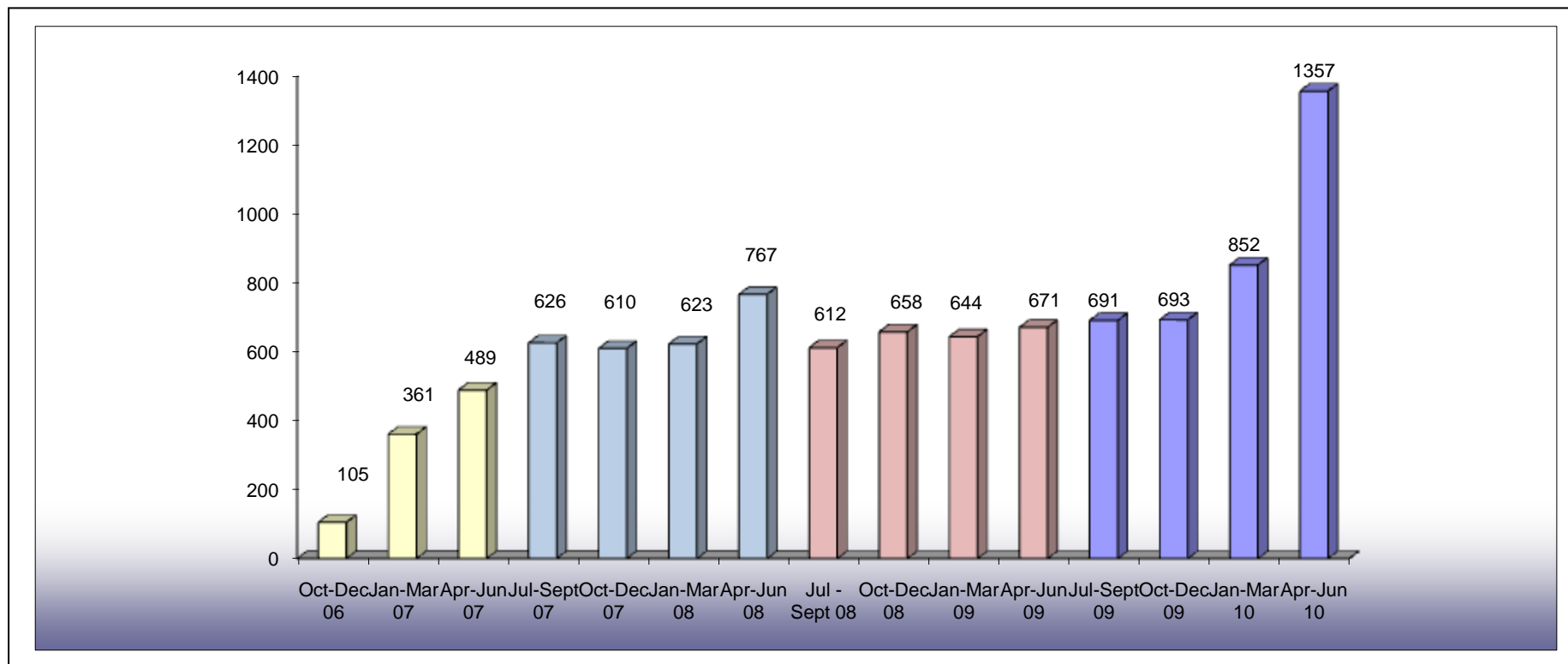
Stroud Village Agents have produced the highest numbers of gateway forms (26.5%) over the year. However, the Community Agents for Urban Areas were only active on the ground for four months of the year 2009/10 and yet submitted 5.5% of all gateways for the year.

As evidenced by the chart on the next page, the overall trend has been for a year on year increase in the number of referrals made, with some increases such as April to June 2007 attributable to the poor weather conditions leading to floods later in July. The substantial increase in referrals for January to March 2010 is likely to be a combination of factors, including the snow, and the digital switchover which affected large parts of the county in March and April. Increased publicity as a result of the scheme being included in a *Countryfile* programme at the end of January may also have resulted in greater demand for the service.

The dramatic leap in April to June 2010 may be due to a combination of factors – higher profile as a result of the media coverage during the snow and the *Countryfile* broadcast could account for some of it. However, as the district breakdown indicates, the high number of referrals made by the Community Agents for Urban areas is going to be a key factor. That they made such an impact in the space of four months demonstrates the very real level of need within the urban communities for the support that this project provides.

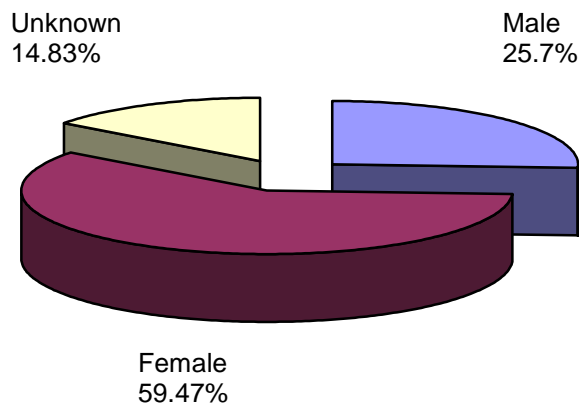
Funding for the pilot project in urban areas was available for six months only, so the project will not be able to continue beyond 18th August.

3.1 GATEWAYS – BY QUARTER



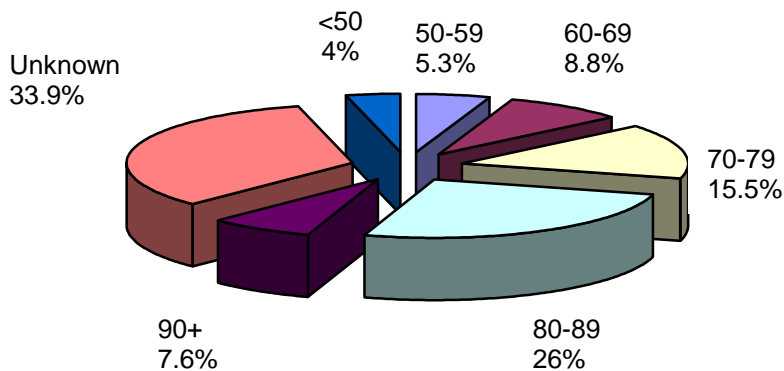
Through the gateway form, Village and Community Agents are able to collect demographic data relating to their clients. This has been collated and is shown in the charts overleaf. *Please note that some of the clients will be repeat clients so there is an element of double counting, but this should not disproportionately affect the results.*

3.1 GATEWAYS – BY GENDER



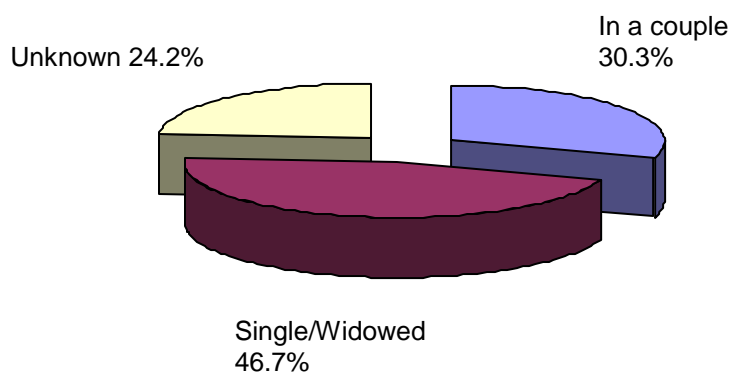
The majority of clients seen by Village and Community Agents are female, at 59.47%. This is a drop from 67% at the end of the Pilot Phase in 2006. However the increased number of anonymous forms in use, as evidenced by the increase in Unknowns to 14.83%, probably masks the true figures slightly since it is a reasonable assumption that the Unknowns will have a similar male/female split to the known referrals.

3.2 GATEWAYS – BY AGE GROUP



While the largest group overall is the unknowns, it is clear that Village and Community Agents work mainly with the more elderly end of the spectrum. With 26% between 80-89 and another 7.6% over 90 we see that the number of those over 80 is almost on a par with the number of unknowns. The 276 people under the age of 50 are largely the result of the work of the Agents for BME communities.

3.3 GATEWAYS – BY LIVING STATUS



Almost half of the clients seen by Village and Community Agents are single or widowed. The anecdotal experience of the Agents indicates a high proportion of elderly women in particular living alone.

4.0 AGENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

4.1 SNOW IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

In February 2009 snow and ice brought Gloucestershire to a standstill and for a week some parts of rural Gloucestershire were extremely badly affected. Village Agents during this time checked on their clients, made sure people were warm enough and had enough food to last through the cold spell.



Sallyanne Batchelor, a Village Agent in the Forest of Dean, appeared on BBC Points West, highlighting the good neighbourly work that was happening across the county. BBC Radio Gloucestershire also called upon Village Agents to find out what was happening in their areas.

January 2010 also brought heavy snowfall to Gloucestershire, cutting off many of the villages in more isolated areas of the county and causing disruption to food supplies to supermarkets. Combined with panic buying, this made it difficult for many elderly residents to keep well supplied. Cars were abandoned in the harsh driving conditions, schools were closed across the county, and many businesses were affected as the treacherous roads made it difficult for staff to get to work.

There was a knock on effect on the Village Agents too, many of whom live in the isolated villages that they represent. Several were unable to leave their villages for days, but they kept in contact with their most vulnerable clients by telephone and visited those that they could. What was admirable was the way in which the communities instantly rallied round, making sure that their vulnerable residents were looked after, salting roads in the villages where salt bins were available, and generally getting on with the task of waiting out the snow.

Below are a few examples of how the Village Agents were able to help their communities:

- Making telephone contact with vulnerable clients to check on their general wellbeing and food situation.
- Making and delivering soup for elderly residents where the Agent was unable to get out of her own village.
- Collecting prescriptions from doctors and chemists and delivering them to clients.
- Shopping trips into Gloucester for supplies of bread and milk when a local supermarket had run out.
- Buying groceries on behalf of clients who were unable to leave their own homes.

- Checking up on an elderly Alzheimer's patient living alone, following a call to Age Concern from the lady's daughter after it became clear carers had been unable to reach her for several days.

There was also a lot of positive coverage of the Village Agents in the local media:

- Lou Kemp was filmed for ITV West visiting clients in Cranham;
- Lorraine Demir and Sallyanne Batchelor were interviewed for Radio Gloucestershire, with Lorraine being shadowed by the reporter around Winchcombe;
- Articles about the project appeared on the BBC Gloucestershire website;
- Daily rolling coverage on the thisisgloucestershire website made several references to the activities of Village Agents;

Mark Harper, MP for the Forest of Dean, also praised the work of Village and Community Agents during the snow in his weekly column in *The Forester*.

4.2 VILLAGE AGENT HELPS WAR HERO GET MEDALS 65 YEARS ON

Lorraine Demir, one of the Agents in Tewkesbury district, made front page news in the Gloucestershire Echo after she helped 92-year-old Seymour Wilcox finally claim the four medals he was awarded for his actions in the Second World War. Mr Wilcox served in the 6th Airborne Division and was dropped behind enemy lines on D-Day but was shot in the face while crossing a river during the operation and was later discharged from the army. It was only after his retirement many years later that he decided to apply for his medals, only to be told he had left it too late.

Half of the Echo's editorial column on 5th February 2010 was dedicated to the story as well, and included these words:

It's clearly filled Seymour with pride – and how appropriate it is that he should make a special point of praising Lorraine.

This hero of the 1940s finally has the credit he deserves thanks to a heroine of the 21st century.

Mr Wilcox was awarded the 1939-45 Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, and War Medal 1939-45.

4.3 COUNTRYFILE

The edition of *Countryfile* broadcast on 31st January 2010 carried a feature on the issue of the increasing age of the rural population. As part of this, John Craven visited Gloucestershire where he accompanied Jane Griffiths and a group of clients on a minibus trip to the Over Farm Market. Jane was also interviewed about the Village Agents project, and while the interview did not feature in the final broadcast it was carried in the BBC national news on the same day.



Following the broadcast, enquiries about the Village Agents project were received from the Scottish Highlands, Cornwall, Norfolk, Durham and Northumberland, both from individuals and from organisations interested in the possibility of such a scheme being set up in their areas. New clients also made contact with Village Agents in Gloucestershire as a result of the national publicity.

4.4 DIGITAL SWITCHOVER

Village and Community Agents assisted clients receiving their television signals from the Mendip transmitter with the Digital Switchover, the first stage of which was on 24th March and which was completed on 7th April.

While many residents managed to sort out the switchover themselves or with the assistance of their families, some interesting problems were thrown up. One elderly gentleman was concerned that he might have to change his television and was reassured to find he did not have to get a new set, because his cat likes sleeping on the current one. Several members of a lunch club in the Forest of Dean receive both central and south west programming on their televisions and were therefore unsure whether they needed to do anything with regards to the switchover.

Agents have assisted people in accessing the Help Scheme, which has worked very well for most clients who have used it. The switchover seemed to progress smoothly, although there are isolated reports of areas which did not seem able to receive the digital transmission through set top boxes and may instead require satellite to receive broadcasts.

4.5 LUNCH ARRANGED FOR COMMUNITIES

In March 2009 Village Agents in the Cotswolds organised a social lunch for some of their clients at the farm shop café in Chedworth. The event was an overwhelming success, with over 60 people in attendance. Each person paid a small amount towards lunch to cover the costs and transport was arranged for those who needed it.



The event enabled those who attended to meet with people from neighbouring parishes, provided a day out for some who do not get to go out on a regular basis, and also provided the opportunity to have a look around the farm shop and the facilities in the sunshine. The Agents involved worked extremely hard to make the day a success, and have continued the social lunch as a regular monthly event.

5.0 CASE STUDIES

The following illustrate some of the fantastic work that Village and Community Agents do on a regular basis (adapted for anonymity) with regard to referrals to outside agencies and general support.

Case Study 1:

At the pop-in lunch, this lady of 86 years asked me about a repair to the lock on her front door, did I know anyone who could do a repair for her?

Anchor Staying Put replaced the lock free under the Poppies Scheme as her late husband was in the RAF. From there, an assessment for Attendance Allowance was successful, Social Services did an OT assessment and various aids were supplied, ie bathing seat, grab rails in various locations, feet on her easy chair to make it easier to get up and down. The loft was insulated, and the British Legion was contacted and supplied a Care Line.

In all a very happy client, who said "I did not think that I could get so much help by asking about my door lock. I think Village Agents are wonderful."

Case Study 2:

I am writing to tell you what a great help your Community Agent has been to me.

My 93 year old Aunt in Tewkesbury, who has always been fiercely independent, became incapacitated, was discharged from hospital, and I had to suddenly come up from Dorset to sort her out. I had no idea which way to turn as I am totally unfamiliar with this sort of situation and I was at my wits end as I knew no-one who could advise me and my Aunt was being very difficult. I am unfamiliar with the area and it was an answer to a prayer that a local lady tapped on the door to enquire of my Aunt and asked me if I needed any help; she fetched your Agent Janet Robinson who in turn brought Jane Griffiths and the two of them instigated all the help I needed. I have now got the TELECARE system set up, keysafe installed, carers in and other various problems sorted.

I am just so very grateful to Janet for coming to help me when I was in such a despairing state of mind, I can't praise her enough; she was comforting, efficient and knew immediately all the right contacts.

I know you are just extending your work into the towns and I want to let you know what a worthwhile service you are offering and wish you every success and also to thank you all very very much.

CASE STUDY 3

Mrs X contacted the Village Agent as she was having problems with letters from a telephone service provider demanding money. She had received three letters from them and despite trying to resolve the issue on the phone herself, the most recent letter indicated that the telephone service provider was going to pursue the debt (which wasn't hers) through the courts. The debt related to a local business which she had no connection to (the business was no longer trading).

The Village Agent became involved and spoke at length to a call centre emphasising the distress that the letters were causing Mrs X. In addition to this, the VA made a complaint (on behalf of Mrs X) via email to the company. The 'debt collection' letters have now stopped, relieving the anxiety and stress that they had caused Mrs X.

During the visit and a general chat with Mrs X, the Village Agent believed that Mrs X may be entitled to Attendance Allowance. Mrs X was happy for the Village Agent to request a home visit from the Benefits Agency to complete the relevant application form. As a result, Mrs X now receives Attendance Allowance and has made an application for a 'Blue Badge' (the application form being requested by the Village Agent).

Mrs X was extremely grateful for the help and support of the Village Agent and has recommended the scheme to others, in particular a neighbour who cares for a close relative without any support.

Case Study 4:

I was asked to visit Mr D, a 74 year old widower, by a member of his family to see if Mr D could get any help with Council Tax payments. At the visit, he agreed to a referral to Pension Service to check for Pension Credit and Council Tax Benefit entitlement.

The house was extremely cold, and heated only with electric fires. The District Council had previously been in touch with me to help them find local owner occupiers who may be interested in installation of new Heat Source pump central heating. Some grant aid may be available to those who satisfy criteria. I discussed this with Mr D who was extremely reluctant to be referred for assessment for the grant aid, but agreed he would speak with his family.

I got more information about the scheme and found it would depend on Pension Credit /Council Tax benefit entitlement. Visited Mr D again to pass on information. He still declined the referral because he found it hard to believe someone would help him get central heating with little or no cost to himself. He agreed I could speak with his family member to explain situation with regard to grant aid and benefit entitlement. I also requested urgent assessment by the Pension Service.

After he discussed the matter with a family member, Mr D agreed to referral. During the following weeks I worked closely with the Council and EON to follow up completion of grant aid forms/documents and to see they were returned for deadline dates. The outcome of the benefit check showed no Pension Credit entitlement but some Council Tax Benefit.

Mr D later received confirmation that he had been awarded £13,500 grant to cover full cost of installation of the central heating system. I have visited Mr D since work has been completed and he is so grateful and overwhelmed; he now has a warm house.

6.0 TRAINING

The training of the Agents is ongoing, with a trainer/service provider introduced each month. Each Agent is also responsible for building up a robust knowledge of their own area.

Village Agents meet on a monthly basis at Community House in Gloucester within their district groups. The Community Agents for Urban Areas have been tying in to these meetings, and with the BME Community Agents coming under the direct management of GRCC from August 2010 as maternity cover for the Agents Manager at the County Council, from August they will also be meeting monthly at Community House. This enables a new trainer to be introduced and a discussion to take place between the Agents about the issues and problems that are arising within their specific areas.



Once a quarter, a meeting is held at an outside venue that involves all the Agents from across the county, enabling cross district working and a chance to hear about the countywide initiatives and sharing of best practice.

Over the course of year 4, training has been given from:

- Digital Switchover Helpscheme
- Safeguarding Adults
- Putting People First
- Royal British Legion
- Sue Ryder Care Hospice
- British Red Cross Medical Equipment Service
- Cotswold Centre for Voluntary Services
- Great Western Ambulance Service – on Community First Responders
- SWEA on Energy Ambassadors
- Carers Gloucestershire
- Libraries and Information Service
- Community Health Trainers
- Healthy Ageing Co-ordinator
- Knightstone Support Agency
- Great Oaks Hospice
- Crossroads Care
- Gloucestershire Deaf Association
- MacMillan Cancer Support – part of the Survivorship pilot project

7.0 ACHIEVEMENTS AND EVENTS

7.1 VILLAGE AGENTS NATIONALLY



Easy access to services and information

Over the past year, interest from other areas around the country has increased, with several other pilot schemes being set up.

Essex County Council and Essex Rural Community Council launched their Village Agents scheme in the summer of 2009; Bath & North East Somerset is running a pilot in the Chew Valley area which has secured funding through to March 2011; South Lakeland District Council and Age Concern (South Lakeland) have been running a scheme since November 2009, while the Northern Fells Group (also in Cumbria) launched in March 2010. South Northants Homes, Supporting People, and Northamptonshire County Council joined forces to launch their project in February 2010, and Warwickshire also launched a small scale pilot in October 2009

Wiltshire is expecting to launch shortly. Carmarthenshire, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Hertfordshire and Hampshire have all visited in the last year to find out more about setting up their own schemes.

7.2 VILLAGE AGENTS GO GLOBAL

In May, John Coxon and Brian Keating from the Department of Work and Pensions visited for an update on how the scheme has progressed since the end of the pilot stage in 2008. They met with two clients to find out directly how the Agents have been helping people in their communities, and over lunch spoke to several of the Village and Community Agents to hear their experiences.

Brian Keating also reported on an international conference discussing older people that he had recently attended in Singapore. He discussed the Village and Community Agents scheme at that conference and there was a great deal of interest expressed from various countries, from Singapore itself to Finland.

7.3 VILLAGE & COMMUNITY AGENTS AND MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

Early in 2009, the 3 Counties Cancer Network allocated some money to look at ways people who are living with and beyond cancer can be supported. Each of the three counties (Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire) were asked to run pilot projects, and in Gloucestershire Village and Community Agents were chosen in conjunction with MacMillan Cancer Support.



All Agents were given training to enable them to identify issues and be more confident in talking to people about the services available to those with a cancer diagnosis. The project is an extension of their existing role in that it is still a signposting service, but cancer patients have specific needs and support available to them which differs slightly from the help available to other clients.

The pilot project is not age restricted so any adult (over 18) with a cancer diagnosis, or family members if appropriate, has access to the support. Agents are funded for

an additional three hours per month for this work. Eight of the Agents were given additional training to act as 'champions'. These specialists are funded for an additional ten hours per month and are not geographically restricted as part of this project.

The pilot launched on 2nd November 2009 and was due to finish at the end of September 2010. However, the 3 Counties Cancer Network is currently looking at the possibility of incorporating the project into the NHS 'Long Term Conditions' QIPP (Quality, Innovation, Productivity, and Prevention) work stream. Agreement in principle has been given to extend the pilot to March 2011.

7.4 VILLAGE AGENTS ONLINE

The Village Agents DVD is now available online for viewing and download at <http://vimeo.com/12293162>.

7.5 CROSS-PROJECT WORKING AT GRCC

One of the advantages of the Village and Community Agents being employed by GRCC is the breadth of projects being run at Community House and the way in which they overlap. For example, the Rural Advisers have been working with various parishes on Emergency Planning, and the Village Agents are an important part of this planning because, as was demonstrated during both the 2007 floods and the snows in 2009 and 2010, the Agents know where the vulnerable people are on the ground and how to contact them.

7.5.1 Digital Switchover

GRCC was one of the organisations which was recruited to assist with publicising the Helpscheme for the Digital Switchover in April and May, tasked with making sure as many of the vulnerable people as possible who were eligible for the Helpscheme were made aware of it and how to access it. Village and Community Agents were able to spread the word directly with individual clients and also by their attendance at luncheon clubs and coffee mornings, while the In Touch Project which works with older peoples groups was also publicising the Helpscheme by sending the groups information.

For the switchover of the Ridge Hill transmitter in 2011, GRCC has been selected as lead organisation by Digital Outreach Limited to publicise the switchover timetable in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. The Village and Community Agents will again play a key role in that publicity in Gloucestershire.

7.5.2 Bowel cancer screening and border issues

Village Agents are also able to highlight problem areas and identify where a service is missing people out. Richard Skinner, who is Agent for Brockweir, Hewelsfield, St Briavels and Tidenham, identified a particular issue with the bowel cancer screening programme caused by the proximity of the England/Wales border. Many of the residents in his area are registered with GPs surgeries in Wales. NHS Gloucestershire was sending out the bowel cancer screening kits by GP surgery, which meant that those people in his area were not sent it by Gloucestershire. However, on the Welsh side of the border the NHS was sending out the screening kits by postcode – which meant the residents of Richard's cluster who are registered with doctors in Wales were being missed out in that selection too.

Richard raised the issue with the Village Agents Manager, who brought the problem to the Gloucestershire Local Involvement Network (LINK). GRCC is the host organisation for LINK so this was as simple as speaking to a colleague. LINK raised the issue formally with NHS Gloucestershire. As a result, several of the GP surgeries on the Welsh side of the border were designated as part of the Gloucestershire programme as well as the Welsh programme, with a postcode selection ensuring the patients did not receive the bowel cancer screening kits twice.