
Village Agents Scheme Year 3 July 2008 to June 2009

Providing older people with
easier access to services and
information

Gloucestershire Rural Community
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Visit www.villageagents.org.uk

VILLAGE AGENTS

Providing older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to services and information

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1.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – AN OVERVIEW

- The scheme is managed by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and joint funded by Gloucestershire County Council and NHS Gloucestershire.

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, including the Police and Fire Service, Affordable Warmth Partnership, Care and Repair/Anchor Staying Put, Age Concern, Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust, District and Borough Councils; Community and Adult Care Directorate; libraries; local churches; parish councils; The Pension Service and many more.

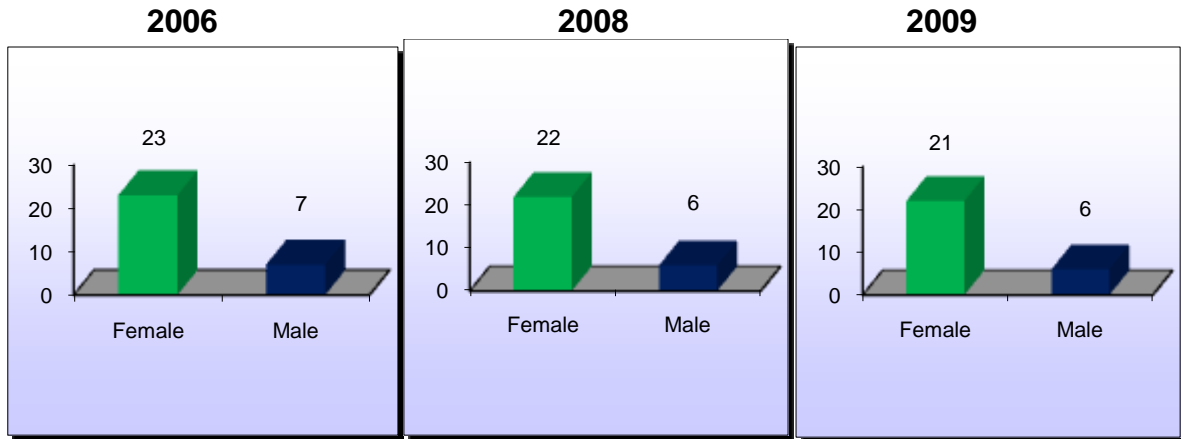


Village Agents bridge the gap between the local community and those statutory and voluntary organisations able to offer help or support where required. Working in 'clusters' of rural communities Village Agents act as facilitators in the provision of high quality information, promote access to a wide range of services, and identify unmet need within their community. Through training and access to appropriate information resources, the Village Agents develop their capacity to provide a service within their communities both in the short and longer-term.

- Village Agents have been recruited locally, trained and supported to provide face to face information and support which enables individuals to make informed choices about their present and future needs. The service is offered primarily to older people, but other disadvantaged and isolated people are also able to receive Village Agent support. Village Agents are CRB checked, they are in a position to visit older people both in their own homes and by running regular surgeries in suitable locations, i.e. village halls, doctor's surgeries etc. Equipped with a laptop and mobile phone, they can access information and give immediate information to their client base.

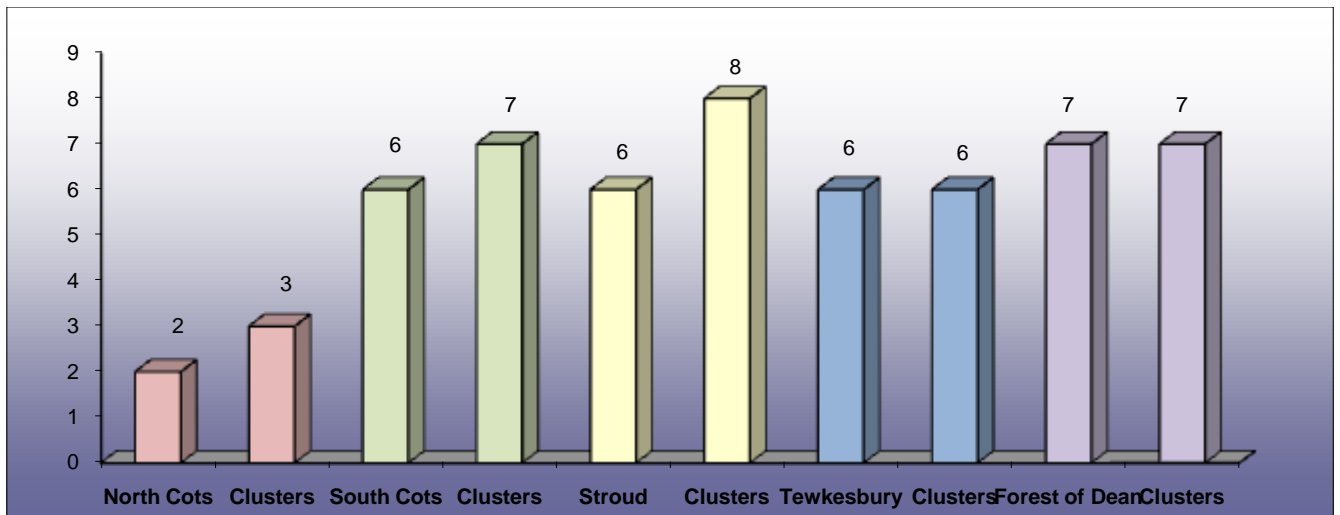
2.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – THE DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE

The village agents come from a variety of backgrounds and range in age from 35 to 70.



Spread of Village Agents by District

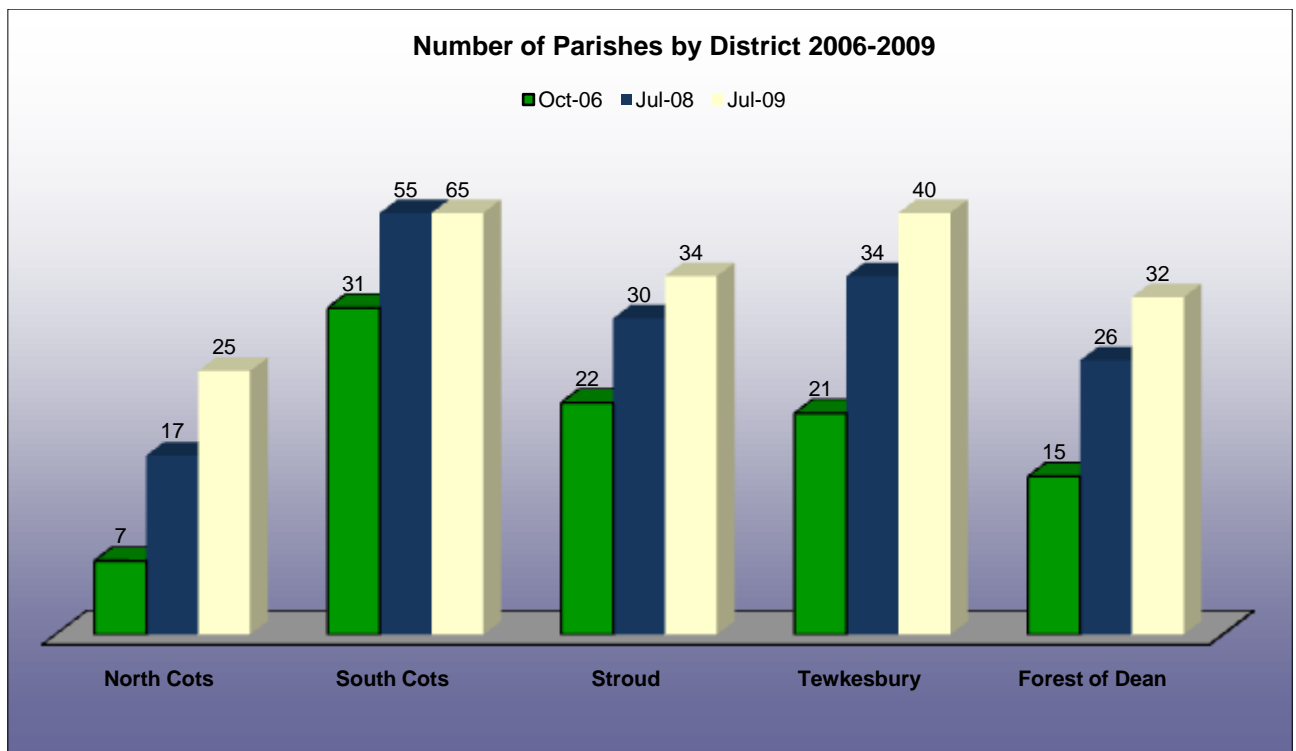
The chart below shows the number of Village Agents per district and the number of 'clusters' of parishes covered (to date July 2009). In the North Cotswolds two Village Agents work in three areas and in the South Cotswolds six Village Agents work in seven areas. In Stroud six Village Agents work in 8 'clusters'.



Column 1 in each series denotes the number of agents in each area, column 2, the number of 'clusters in each area.

Spread of Parishes Covered by Village Agents

- In 2006 when the project began, Village Agents worked in 96 parishes across rural Gloucestershire. In 2008 this had grown to 162. At the end of Year 3 in July 2009 the number officially stands at 196
- The parishes were originally mapped by analysing existing services available, transport links and areas of deprivation. As the scheme progressed however new parishes were added on recommendations from both Village Agents and agencies.
- The chart below shows how the scheme has grown since the pilot stage in 2006. Numbers of parishes covered in each district have steadily grown year on year.
- Plans are in place to expand the scheme further in the future

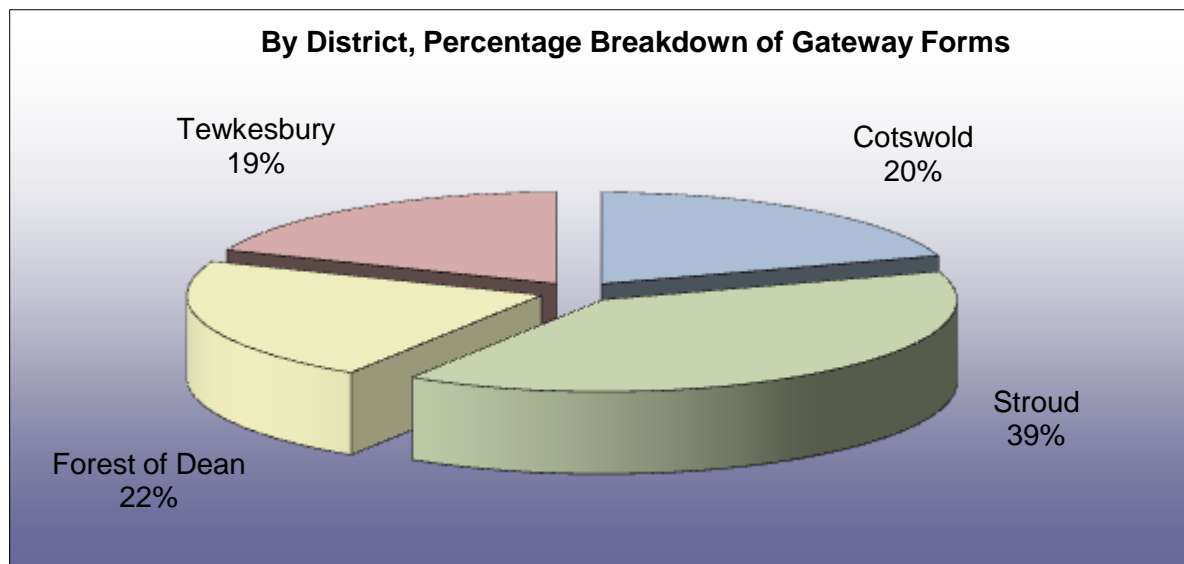


3.0 REFERRALS

After each visit a Village Agent makes, they are required to fill in an online referral, '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 emailed to the required agency by the Village Agent for the query to be addressed.

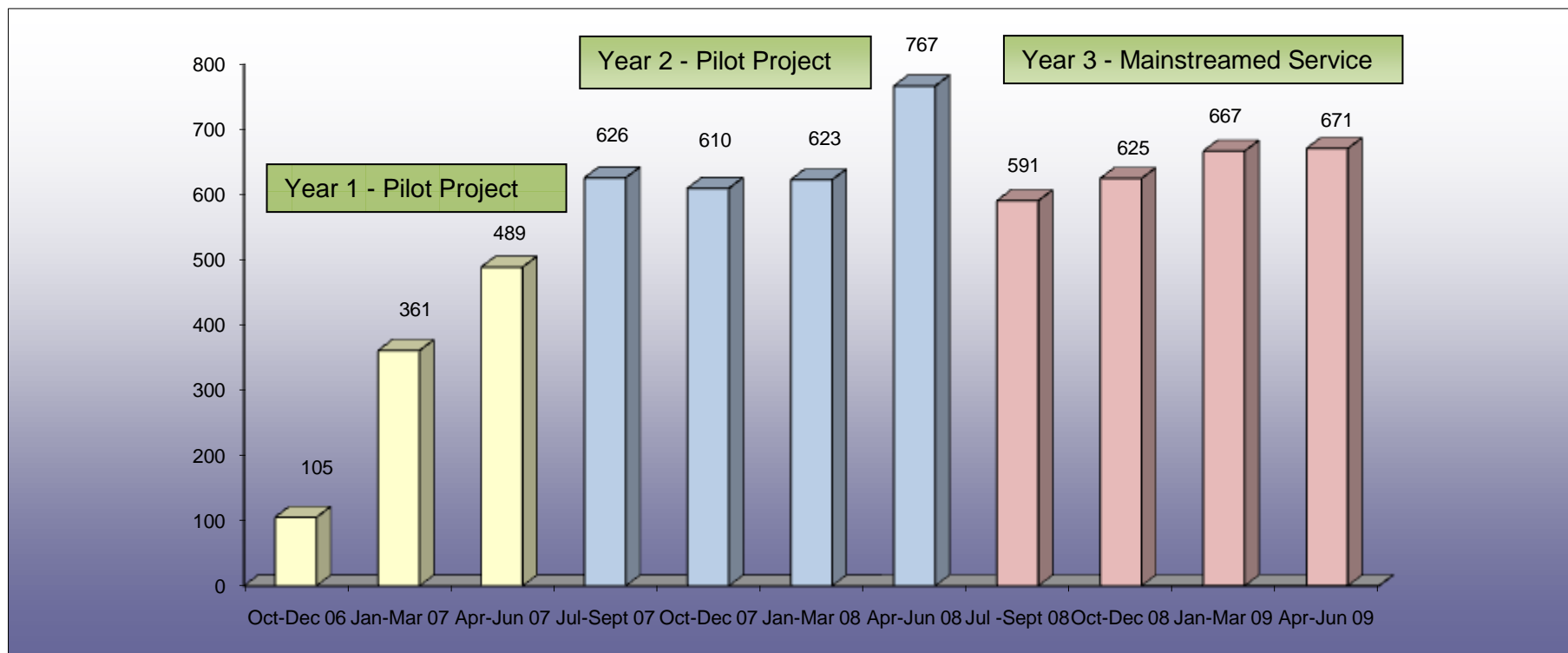


Since the gateway system was introduced in December 2006 **6,135** have been submitted, 2,554 of these were submitted in year 3. A percentage breakdown for year 3 (July 2008-June 2009) by district is shown below.



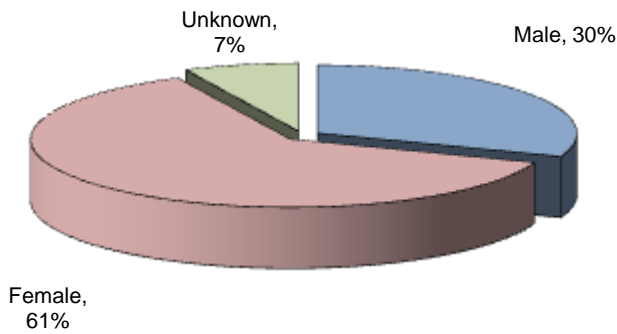
Stroud Village Agents have produced the largest numbers of gateway forms (39%) over the year, with the other districts sharing a similar proportion.

After a peak in referrals in the summer of 2008, figures have levelled out during the third year of the scheme and have, with the exception of January to March increased throughout the year. On average Village Agents are producing 24 gateways per 'cluster' every quarter during year three, comparable to the previous year.



Through the gateway form, Village 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, this however should not dramatically affect the results proportionately.*

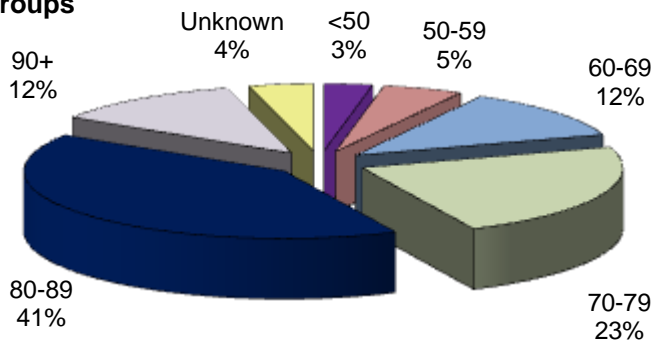
Gateways - By Gender



The majority (61%) of clients seen by Village Agents are female

This in context is in part to be expected as over half (approximately 55%) of Gloucestershire's over 50 population are female. (ONS statistics)
Unknown – Client anonymous

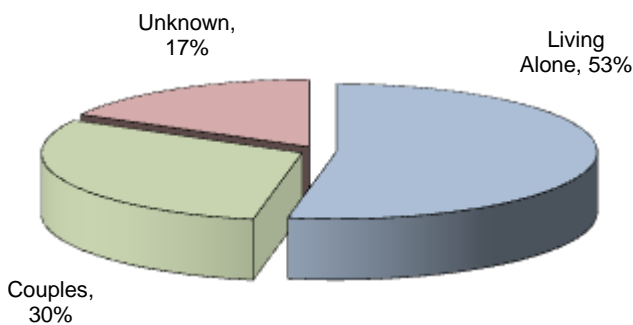
Age Groups



The largest numbers of gateway forms have been completed for the 80-89 age-group (41%) this is an increase on year 2 when 31% of clients were in this age group

Unknown – Client anonymous

Gateways - Living Status



Over half (53%) of clients seen by Village Agents live alone, this has increased slightly on year 2 where 49% of clients lived alone.

Unknown – Client anonymous

4.0 VILLAGE AGENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

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 throughout the cold spell. Sallyanne Batchelor a Village Agent in the Forest of Dean made an appearance 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.

Following Village Agent success at the 2008 'Meet the Dragons' event, the BBC Radio 4 You and Yours programme shadowed a Village Agent for a morning, this was broadcast early in the year. The programme sparked further interest from around the country from organisations and individuals alike.

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 and provided a day out for some who do not get to go out on a regular basis. The agents involved worked extremely hard to make the day a success, the lunch has become a regular event.



"Jane and I did the In the Pink sponsored walk for breast cancer on Sunday sporting our VA polo shirts. We were lucky with the weather because the sun came out as we were dropped at our starting point and it got quite hot for a while. I had the polo shirt on underneath so the sweatshirt ended up tied round my waist - logo on display, of course. I raised £51 and Jane raised £200!! We walked from Bigsweir to the Monmouth

Showground along the Wye Valley. It was organised by the Monmouth Rotary Club "*Helen Roberts Forest of Dean*"

During the latter part of 2008 Jane Griffiths, a Village Agent from the



Tewkesbury Borough included older people from her parishes as well as other Village Agent areas in a project that involves knitting squares for Oxfam. Over 300 squares were produced across the county which were sent to London as part of a wider, national initiative. Each square represents a child whose mother has died in childbirth due to inadequate healthcare in poorer countries. Older people in Gloucestershire who have

taken part have benefited immensely from taking part; many have arthritis and have commented that the gentle exercise has helped with this, while others have said that they have felt useful and that they are contributing to something which has helped their quality of life and self esteem.

This is a snapshot of some of the things that Village Agents have been involved in, for more information please contact GRCC 01452 528491

5.0 CASE STUDIES & ISSUES

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

Case Study 1:

An endearing lady of 80 who has deteriorating sight. I was asked to go and visit her by The Community Nurse at Rendcomb Surgery. After discussing a few things with her, she agreed she should have some smoke detectors as she sometimes forgets things on the cooker. She also agreed to attend a Falls Clinic in Cirencester. As she now finds it difficult to read I arranged for a Librarian to visit and she now has talking books which she thoroughly enjoys. I still visit her because I feel she will have continuing needs.

Case Study 2:

Mr W was a 65 year old divorcee and retired construction worker. He lived on his own in rented accommodation in a small village. Following a presentation I gave to the local Parish Council I had a phone call from Mr W who said someone at the meeting had told him about me and could I call and see him.

On my visit he said that he did not mix with or talk to people in the village but a neighbour had knocked on his door and told him about me. He was initially worried that due to poor health he may be admitted to hospital and wanted to know how he stood with his landlord. He was worried that he would be evicted if he had a prolonged stay in hospital. (I later obtained a booklet from Shelter that outlined his rights)

It was clear that Mr W was ill, lonely and very, very independent. He said he did not want help from social services or accept any more 'hand-outs' from any-one. He had his pension, DLA, Housing Benefit and said he needed nothing more. It was clear to me that he needed further help but I did not push things on the first visit.

During the next two months I made several visits and each time Mr W accepted more help. He accepted calls and advice from Social Care. He allowed Smoke Alarms to be fitted in his house. He took my advice to arrange a local key holder. He arranged a local gardener to tidy up his garden. He was in the process of arranging a cleaner when he was admitted to hospital. I kept in contact through his next of kin who was an ex-partner of his. She lived some distance from Mr W so did not visit him often but kept in touch by phone. She kept me up to date with his condition which was getting graver by the day. She told me that due to his making contact with people in the village, key holder, gardener, cleaner and his next door neighbour he was getting lots of visitors in hospital. She said that he had become aware that people around him cared about him which he was not aware of before.

Before I was able to visit him I received a call from his next of kin to say that Mr W had passed away. She said that on the morning of his death he asked to see her and priest as he knew he was nearing the end. Later I was told by a neighbour who had visited him that he said he wanted to say thanks to all the people that had helped him and to thanks his new 'mate' George. I attended his funeral and it was obvious that Mr W was a lonely person. Only a few attended including a number from his village. Some members of his family did not attend. Those who were there thanked me for what I had done for him

It was a sad end to a very lonely person but he died knowing that there were people who cared for him and wanted to help him. His next of kin said that she is sure he would have been very happy the way things ended, especially that he was cremated on a warm sunny spring day.

Case Study 3:

I had already seen Mrs J. and had organised for smoke alarms to be fitted in her house as she was a heavy smoker and over 80 years old. When I received another call from her I was not too surprised when she asked me to call on her as she had a small repair that needed doing. She lives in a very old cottage which, although in good repair, I expected that a door or a window might have been broken or needed work on it. She took me in to the sitting room and said it was the door that needed seeing to. It seemed to me that the doors looked alright but she then walked up to this large Grandfather clock in the corner and opened the small glass door on the front of the clock face.

As she pointed out one of the hinges was broken and she was worried the door might fall off. This is a family heirloom you know! It wasn't quite what we had had all the training on but using my contacts I was soon able to locate a clock repairer who duly mended the door to the delight of Mrs J.

Case Study 4:

A 'Day in the Life' of a Village Agent

8.40am - Telephone call from very anxious client. The referral was made to me by the GP surgery. The issues were sensitive and complex because of some mental health difficulties. Reassurance was given about pending matters and home visit arranged. Follow up work will need to include the help of the Citizens Advice Bureau. Call made to them.

9.30am Telephone calls made to:

A Client and Occupational Therapy regarding a Social Care assessment that was outstanding

Call to Social Worker and GP's surgery to ask about disability aids for client.

Calls to Care and Repair, Warm and Well and the District Council about a client, 80 years of age, living in a Park Home, who had telephoned to ask if

she could get help because her gas boiler had broken down, and she could not afford to pay engineer to look it.

11am Visit to Day Centre. Talked with members about various issues – Social Care aids – Attendance Allowance claim – Gardening Scheme – Bereavement issues. Helped with lunches and went with Day Centre helper to take lunch to 89 year old gentleman living alone, feeling too frail to leave his home. Quickly assessed further visit needed urgently to check on Social Care needs and benefits.

1.30pm Left the Day Centre to visit a member who was not able to visit the Centre today because she had developed leg ulcer. Lady, 87 years of age, living with her son. Her visits to the Day Centre are very important to her and she visits most weeks. A volunteer driver collects her from home. She is taken to the Day Centre, and returned home afterwards. Worried she is not going to be able to visit the Centre for sometime in case she injures her leg. Reassured her that if she wishes to visit, arrangements can be made to make sure she is comfortable and placed in a situation where she could be safe. Client's situation discussed with Day Centre organisers and planned a further visit very soon.

2pm Home visit to lady, 88 years of age to explain her entitlement to a recent award of Attendance Allowance. Agreed to help her pursue a claim for Pension Credit

3.30pm Home visit to the client, whose gas boiler had broken down. She was feeling very low, and finding life difficult without hot water and heating. Further telephone conversations with the District Council and Care and Repair to obtain an agreement for urgent action to be taken to determine whether gas boiler can be repaired or new boiler needed. Assurance given Welfare Officer from Care and Repair would visit client urgently

5pm. Referral from the District Council to visit elderly couple, 80 years and 90 years respectively and housebound, worried because they have quantity of diabetic sharps they cannot dispose of. Completed general check for social care support and aids – completed benefit check – some follow up needed on this matter – took away diabetic sharps. Further visit planned in two weeks time to follow up the welfare benefit issue.

6.0 TRAINING

The training of the Village 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 to provide essential baseline data and to contribute this information to a gateway website which is available to view at www.villageagents.org.uk



Village Agents meet on a monthly basis at Community House in Gloucester within their district groups. 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, at an outside venue a meeting is held 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 3 training has been given from:

- Guide and Pals
- Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue
- The Alzheimer's Society
- The Parkinson's Society
- Gloucestershire Association for the Blind
- Gloucestershire Association for the Deaf
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Gloucestershire NHS
- GRCC
- Cotswold Care Hospice
- Bowel Cancer Awareness
- Guideposts
- Tewkesbury Volunteer Centre

7.0 ACHEIVEMENTS AND EVENTS

FULL OF LIFE 2008



The Village and Community Agent 'Celebrating the Achievements of Older People Awards' took place for the second year in September as part of the Gloucestershire Full of Life event. The event was held at Kingsholm Rugby Ground with over 50 agencies showcasing their work with interactive displays. Attendees could take part in a belly dancing display, play on a Nintendo

Wii, have a driving lesson with the Safer Driving in Older Age team or just wander round the stands enjoying the day. Over 750 people attended the event with one of the highlights being the awards ceremony. For a full list of winners and those who were highly commended please visit our website www.villageagents.org.uk

LINKAGE EVENTS 2008

During June, July and August 2008 LinkAge held a succession of events around the country to showcase the pilot projects that had been in operation since 2006. Village Agents attended in Newcastle, Bournemouth, Birmingham and London and drew a lot of attention from local authorities and agencies interested in the scheme. The events were a useful tool in sharing best practice and learning from other areas of the country who had approached the brief of providing older people with easier access to services and information in different ways.

VILLAGE AGENTS NATIONALLY

Over the past year there has been a great deal of interest from other areas around the country looking to develop their own scheme. In November the Cabinet Office made a two day visit to Gloucestershire and spent their time talking to recipients of the scheme and shadowing Village Agents.

Essex County Council along with Essex Rural Community Council made a visit in October and has secured funding to start a Village Agent scheme.

Wiltshire, the Isle of Wight, Leicestershire and Rutland, Hertfordshire, Cumbria and Bristol and North Somerset have all visited with an interest in setting up similar schemes.

NATIONAL THIRD SECTOR EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2008

In 2008, Village Agents were shortlisted as finalists in the national Third Sector Excellence Awards in the Public Sector Partnership category. In November the awards ceremony was held at the Hurlingham Club in South London. Despite making the final three, Village Agents were beaten to the award by Battersea Arts for an innovative project in their area of London. Being nominated and reaching the final was excellent publicity for the Village Agent scheme.



FEATURES IN RURAL POVERTY REPORT

In July 2008, a report was published by the Commission for Rural Communities entitled Rural Financial Poverty: Priorities for Action in which Village Agents featured as one of their case studies, held up as a best practice model. The report updated the priorities for addressing financial poverty in rural England, re-examining evidence and looking at how the policy landscape has changed. A member of the Commission for Rural Communities came out to Gloucestershire and made a visit with one of the Village Agents in the Stroud District witnessing a visit by Warm and Well and a home insulation check, he then sat in on a Village Agent meeting and received feedback from the Agents on how they saw the current climate and how it was effecting their



clients. The report can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk or from a link from our website www.villageagents.org.uk

VILLAGE AGENTS AND MCMILLIAN CANCER SUPPORT

The 3Counties Cancer Network has allocated some money to look at ways people who have survived cancer can be supported. They have chosen Village Agents for a pilot scheme in Gloucestershire. The initial proposal is that all Agents would have some training as part of routine training to enable them to identify issues and be more confident in talking to people. There will be an (as yet) unspecified number of Agents who act as 'champions' who have more in depth training and consequently more knowledge of issues. Proposed aim of the new Village Agent role:

That people living with or beyond cancer would be provided with face to face information and support which facilitates access to available services and enables them to make informed choices about their future needs.

VILLAGE AGENTS 'AWAY DAY'



On 26th November 2008 all Village Agents met at Maisemore Village Hall to discuss the scheme, ways forward and how to learn from the pilot stage. The day was extremely productive with a number of new ideas being formulated some of which have already been 'actioned' and being used to make the scheme more efficient.

NEW MAP LAUNCH AND EXPANSION

When the scheme began in July 2006 a total of 92 parishes were covered by Village Agents this has now increased to just over 200 – reasons for this include an identified need in a number of areas, a request by a parish for a Village Agent, an increase in capacity of the Village Agent in question (additional hours paid). There have also been a number of changes to the scheme in terms of personnel and therefore it has been possible in some areas to add an additional agent.



In Tewkesbury Borough Lorraine Demir who has been a Village Agent for a year has changed the parishes in which she works, Lorraine now works in the parishes around Winchcombe including Stanton, Stanway, Buckland and Snowhill and her previous cluster around Staverton, Down Hatherley and Boddington are now covered by Lesley Wall.

When a Village Agent is replaced or 'moved' the mobile phone that they have been using stays 'attached' to the cluster, therefore if a potential client calls their Village Agent they will be able to speak to the person working in their area, it also ensures that any publicity done is relevant and clients are not passed 'from pillar to post' before their Village Agent is reached.

All changes however have been reflected in the new Village Agent map – available from April 2009. Maps have been distributed across the county, to Parish Councils, GP surgeries and partner agencies amongst others.