

## Good Neighbours Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Year One Report - May 2012

### Introduction

In March 2011 WRVS Dumfries and Galloway, was awarded a Rural Dumfries and Galloway LEADER grant. The purpose of the grant was to build on the foundations of our previous local Stewartry Transport and Books on Wheels services, and establish a region-wide Good Neighbours service providing integrated support, transport and signposting for older people with low-level needs living in the community, predominantly in rural areas. The service is delivered by local volunteers, from local communities across the region, supported by a team of paid staff.

### Putting the service-user first

At the heart of our expanding service we have a new more highly trained kind of volunteer, an 'Outcome Co-ordinator'. These specially trained volunteers meet with each older person in the comfort and security of their own homes, to determine what they need and want to stay happy, healthy and independent. Our staff then put together the support package to meet those needs through an existing service from WRVS or by signposting to another organisation. The recruitment of the Outcome Co-ordinators will have a significant impact on the number of people receiving the service.

The service is now operating with 9 trained Outcome Co-ordinators covering Annan, Lockerbie, Castle Douglas, Langholm, Dumfries and Dalbeattie. We also have a growing pool of volunteers to draw on to meet people's needs and the increasing number of referrals being received. At the end of March '12 we had 90 volunteers and 150 service-users registered to use the service. We recognise that service-user numbers are lower than anticipated but this is due to the late start of the project and we are now confident that moving forward we will be in a far stronger position to achieve targets.

We have to date reported on 616 non-transport tasks and 763 transport tasks through our volunteer task and time sheets. This is lower than we had planned when our funding application was submitted. This is partly due to the late start of the project. However a significant factor is the need to educate our volunteers to understand their and WRVS's requirement to complete detailed reporting and timesheets. We know from conversations with volunteers that they give much more support to the service-users than these figures suggest e.g. befriending in addition to shopping support. We are continuing to work with our volunteers to change this, and as new and existing volunteers are trained and inducted we know that more accurate reporting of activity will be captured.

Initially, we were receiving a significant number of inappropriate referrals for the service. We have addressed this issue by introducing a new referral form and criteria for 'registration'. With the successful introduction of this clear referral process, social work services, families and service-users are now forwarding referrals with clear information about people's requirements and preferences. This approach over the next 12 months will support an increase in the number of referrals and service-users supported. There has been very little need to signpost, due to our project being able to provide the service. Some signposting occasions have proved difficult e.g. age restrictions, other organisations not always having the capacity or the referral not meeting their criteria. However, we continue to signpost and network with partner organisations as much as possible.

It is clear that our marketing activity is having a major positive impact on awareness of our service. This has been and continues to be essential in raising service-user awareness and supporting volunteer recruitment.

We have made contact with and presented to:

- GP surgeries
- Churches
- Third Sector Forum
- Colleges
- Older Peoples Carers Group
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse Befriending Forum
- Annandale and Eskdale Local Health Partnership
- Dumfries and Galloway Local Authority- Social Work Teams
- Volunteer Action
- WRI Tynrum
- Rural Transport Solutions
- Retired and Independent Ladies Group Lockerbie

In addition we have distributed 3000 service leaflets across Dumfries and Galloway.

The service has been and continues to actively seek new volunteers and to develop our training package for new and existing volunteers. As part of a UK-wide development, WRVS is seeking to upskill all our volunteers and to encourage them to be as flexible as possible. As such our Books on Wheels volunteers have been integrated into Good Neighbours. The Good Neighbours team are also working closely with the Meals on Wheels, Frozen Meals services and the lunch club, giving their volunteers the opportunity to provide a wider more generic range of support to the older people they visit.

The response to these developments has been overwhelming. Many people are interested in the Outcome Co-ordinator role, which is a fantastic opportunity, particularly for people who might be retiring from caring roles in social work or health.

Whilst most of our volunteers are generally older, we are also working hard to encourage younger people to volunteer with us. This is a useful platform for future employment and is also welcomed by our service-users. Good Neighbours staff were present at the Dumfries College Care Fayre which proved to be a huge success, with many young people showing great interest. We are at present working with the college with a view to giving talks and presentations in the future to students studying social care. We have also recently met with Volunteer Action and through them we have a number of people awaiting completion of the volunteer recruitment process.

## Staff

Development of the new, broader Good Neighbours service was unfortunately delayed by a comprehensive restructure within WRVS across the UK. Legal obligations meant that we were unable to recruit new staff until late summer. Delays were further compounded when our first service co-ordinator appointed in July left after 2 months. However the current team of full-time Co-ordinator, part-time Locality Manager and part-time Administrator have now been in post since mid-November and there is great enthusiasm for getting this much needed project up to speed and making up for lost time.

## Looking ahead - Year Two

Despite a slow start, WRVS Good Neighbours is now demonstrating upward steady growth towards the highly integrated service that we had anticipated. Original targets set were based on demographics and our experience in delivering the service is that it will be a big task to achieve those original targets set. However, as our report demonstrates numbers are increasing steadily and WRVS will continue to grow the service day by day. It is pleasing to know that we are now reaching older people in need, and providing worthwhile volunteering opportunities for others.

We plan to reconfigure the staffing ratio to support the service at a more strategic level where networking and relationship building with partners can be achieved. This will bring the project back on track and progressing towards the targets set.