

Search Project

Funding needed:	£55,000 per annum for three years
Potential impact:	Low ←————●————→ High
Risk:	Low ←————●————→ High
Difficulty of fundraising:	Low ←————●————→ High

- Pensioners often live in poverty and lack opportunities for exercise
- Search Project provides benefits advice and promotes healthy living
- Funding could improve the prospects for some of the poorest older people
- NPC views Search Project as an effective one-stop shop for older people

Issue: Pensioners often live in poverty and lack opportunities for exercise

NPC estimates that 1.8 million older people in the UK experience a combination of poverty, isolation and exclusion. Two contributing factors are that older people do not get all of the financial help they need, and are entitled to, and many do not get enough physical activity.

Benwell, Newcastle, has a long history of poor health, extensive poverty and high levels of dependency on benefits. Many of the local wards are among the most deprived in England. More advice on benefits is needed because it can play a vital role in alleviating poverty – as many as a third of entitled pensioners do not receive important income benefit.

The government stresses the importance of physical activity in maintaining the health of older people. Exercise prevents specific diseases, reduces falls and accidents, and promotes good mental, as well as physical, health. However, the government often fails to provide opportunities to those most in need.

Charities address these needs by providing advice, physical support, social activities and exercise programmes.



Mrs B is a 73 year old widow who lives alone. She was unhappy in her present accommodation: she was not warm enough, felt lonely and depressed and didn't get out of the house much.

The welfare rights worker at Search Project looked into her housing options and arranged for her to stay in temporary accommodation and persuaded her landlord to install central heating. A benefits check showed she was eligible for Attendance Allowance resulting in an extra £98 per week.

The outcome is that she is better off financially and feels less isolated because she regularly participates in activities organised by Search Project.

Response: Search Project provides benefits advice and promotes healthy living

Search Project was set up in the 1970s and is one of the longest-established charities in Benwell. It aims to increase the take-up of welfare benefits and promote healthy living among local pensioners. It is based in a shop-fronted building on the high street. It is a one-stop shop for older people from the local community. Its key activities are:

- Helping and advising local pensioners and their carers through a daily drop-in service at the centre. It advises on benefits and signposts people on how and where to get support for specific illnesses. Over 600 older people sought advice in 2004 during its morning drop-in sessions.
- Making home visits to housebound people to deliver the same advice and information as offered in the centre.
- Offering a programme of weekly leisure activities, which is shaped by the older people themselves. It includes walking groups, complementary therapy and IT courses. In 2004, 350 older people participated in its leisure activities.

Search Project has six staff (two full-time and four part-time). Annual income was £165,000 in 2004, 80% of which came from statutory sources.

Results: Funding could improve the prospects for some of the poorest older people

Search Project is very effective at reaching those who need it most. The high street location ensures that it is highly visible, and staff proactively go out into the community to promote the services.

An evaluation of the health promotion work carried out by Search Project in 2003 found many benefits:

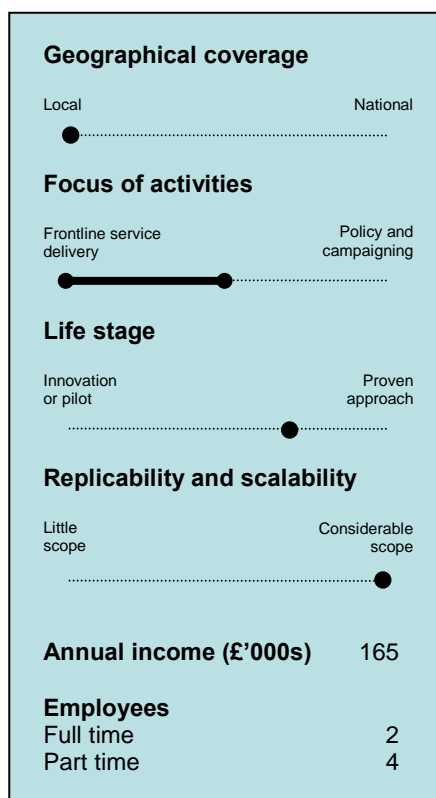
- Many of the 600 users of the advice service were supported on multiple issues.
- Many reported physical benefits; they found that treatments, such as aromatherapy massage, eased pain and stress.
- People reported an increase in self confidence; many made friendships, decreasing their sense of isolation. The evaluation found that 83% stated 'meeting people' was the key benefit from health and social activities. Interaction in discussions on reminiscence, planning and decision making, as well as classes on computer skills, also gave people a lot of mental stimulation.

Quotes from existing users:

'Search helped me with benefits advice and I'd recommend them to anyone. Whenever there's anything I need to know they put me on the right road.'

'They sorted out everything for me following my heart attack. They were really excellent.'

Search Project secured an additional £300,000 of benefits in 2004 through morning sessions and only one advisor. However, there are still at least 3,000 older people in west Newcastle not claiming the benefits they are entitled to and unnecessarily living in poverty. If the organisation could get funding for one additional benefits worker, it could secure an extra £250,000 for 500 older people.



NPC views Search Project as an effective one-stop-shop for older people

Search Project is a well established, friendly and accessible local hub of its community – a 'one-stop shop' for older people. People may drop in to seek advice on housing benefits, but also sign up for an arts and crafts session or with an appointment for an aromatherapy massage.

What makes it unusual is its strong focus on preventing illnesses and promoting healthy living. It also recognises the importance of funding evaluation of its work in order to review its effectiveness.

NPC recommends supporting Search Project. Some examples of where funding could be used are:

- A donation of £50,000 could enable the organisation to hire an additional benefits advice worker. It is challenging to find funding for advice work, despite the huge impact it has on alleviating poverty among older people.
- A donation of £5,000 could be used for a much needed refurbishment of the centre.

NPC views funding Search Project as relatively low risk because it has been operating for over 30 years and has a strong network of support from other local charities and statutory agencies.

For more information on older people in the UK, see our report: *Grey Matters: Growing older in deprived areas*, at www.philanthropycapital.org

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