

# Winter Warmth - Impact Report

Autumn 2018



This report looks at the impact of funding awarded by County Durham Community Foundation (the Foundation) from the Winter Warmth Fund over the past eight years and looks at the difference the funding has made to people in our communities.

Winter Warmth is a fund historically supported by individual donors through direct contributions of their annual personal winter fuel allowance. This has provided approximately £8,000 to award as grants per year to support people at risk of isolation in the winter months.

## Award Profile

Winter Warmth grants totalling more than £81,000 have been awarded between 2010 to 2018 to support projects, often in the most deprived areas and/ or rural areas of County Durham.

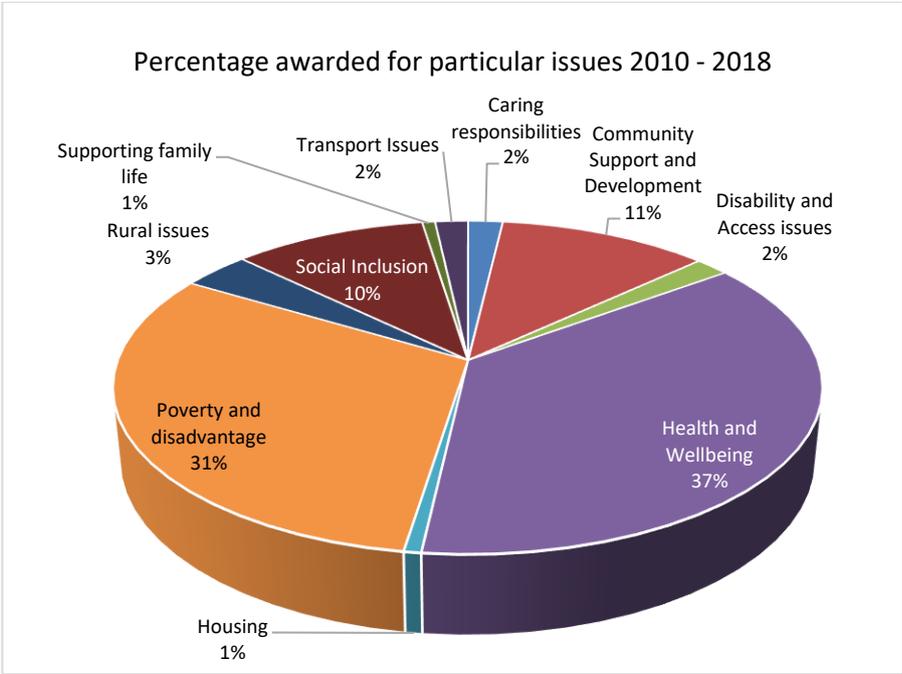
Economic and social isolation is a key issue for rural communities; being one of the largest rural counties in the UK has resulted in the creation of a very expensive public transport system organised on a 'hub and spoke' model i.e. travelling between places usually involves having to go into a centre of population and back out again, adding to the time and cost involved. As our region is also one with high levels of disadvantage - and in the top 20% most deprived areas nationally – cold winter weather brings real hardship to those already struggling.

In total, almost 6,000 people have benefited from Winter Warmth grants that, despite the wide variety of projects and issues, predominantly supported people who were isolated and vulnerable at the harshest time of year.

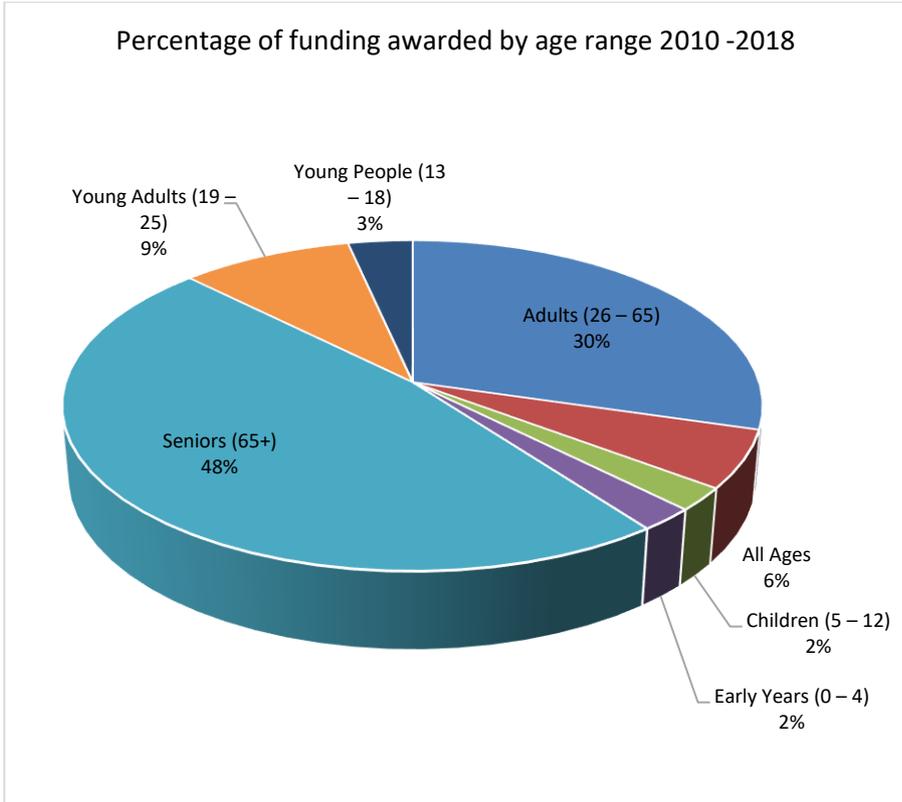
Grants made to organisations or to individual facing hardship have mainly targeted:

- Health & wellbeing
- Poverty and disadvantage
- Community support and development
- Social inclusion

Figures show that over two third of Winter Warmth funding has supported people with their health & wellbeing or disadvantaged people often facing poverty, literally making a choice between eating or heating.



The assumption in previous years was that the beneficiaries of the Winter Warmth funding would mainly be elderly. We have seen through the distribution of grants over recent years that austerity and cuts in services have had an effect on families, particularly those who were previously 'just managing'. The demographics have changed, including the age and the circumstances of grants beneficiaries. Fundamentally, the 'need' for our support has grown.



## Case Studies

### Lifeline Community Action

A grant of £1,000 to Lifeline Community Action (LCA) provided support over the Christmas period in 2017 to help them supply food hampers to people in need. The grant enabled the charity to buy food, warm clothing, duvets and blankets to help keep people warm over the cold months. With their community connections and a £1,000 Winter Warmth grant, LCA was able to secure c£9k worth of goods to help those in need.

By LCA providing food, vulnerable people were not forced to make the stark choice of either putting food on their table or turning off their heating. People who received help described it as 'life saving'. It meant that when times really did feel bleak for those who may have suffered from an unexpected, unfortunate change in circumstances, help was available.

LCA helped almost 150 individuals over a four-month period, and more than three quarters of those had children. Overwhelmingly, almost all of those people said that by being given this support that their circumstances had improved significantly.

For LCA, the Winter Warmth grant meant that they could continue their work distributing goods to an increased number of struggling families in County Durham.

### Beyond limits

Beyond Limits is a charity based in Bishop Auckland that helped more than 180 people in crisis with its grant of £1,000, providing families with winter clothing and coats, as well as warm duvets and blankets to combat the cold at home. They also provided heat pads and sleeping bags to local homeless people.

This support ensured that as many people as possible were warmer and felt that they could afford to put their heating on. They also provided additional food hampers and household packages that reportedly made a huge difference to the quality of life for desperate people, putting food on the table so that they had the choice to turn on the heating.

Jane had recently escaped a violent relationship, settling in the area with her children, having to set up home from scratch. Due to changes in her benefits she had not received any income for several weeks other than a small payment from part-time work. She approached LCA to see if they could help as she didn't have any food in the house, the children had no winter coats or shoes and she had no duvets on the beds other than throws that someone had given her. LCA provided her with a food & household goods hamper that included duvets and bedding for all the beds and a children's package, which included winter clothing for all the family.

*Jane was thrilled with the help she received:*

*"The volunteers at LCA have been amazing, I can't thank everyone enough for what you have done for me. The kids are no longer complaining of being cold during the night and I am no longer lying awake crying from stress and worry.*

*I don't know what people like me would do if you weren't there to help. You are so good - me and my kids thank you!"*

The main challenge for Beyond Limits was coping with the demand; although the Winter Warmth grant made a huge difference to individuals and families, they had more requests for help than they could realistically meet.

To counter this, Beyond Limits worked with another charity to provide food parcels for Christmas and made referrals to them to ensure everyone who asked for help received food and toys at Christmas. The Winter Warmth grant prevented them from turning people away at a time when they needed help most.

## Age UK

**Reducing loneliness:** Gladys is an older lady in her 80s, recently widowed, who did everything with her late husband, including running their own taxi firm. She contacted Age UK County Durham asking for help. She explained that she was feeling very low and that she did not have any friends due to the fact they worked all their lives.

The development worker from Age UK invited Gladys to come along to the 'Keep Warm Keep Well' coffee morning in the village, funded by a grant of £900 from the Winter Warmth fund, and have a chat and to see if there was anything that she was interested in.

Social activities, such as Come Eat Together and information about other activities were provided, and after more discussions and reassurances Gladys decided to join some of the activities, as well as being signposted to other activities in her area.

Gladys said later that it had been very hard to take the initial step of joining the groups, but she is so pleased she did as she now has people she can talk to and interact with. She told the Age UK she had "a fantastic time" and felt positive about life for the first time in ages. She said everyone was friendly, and she had seen other people from the village she lived but not spoken to, so she felt like it was the change she needed. She said: "It feels like a step into giving me my life back."

**Winter warmth:** Fred was wearing his coat and gloves indoors because he believed he couldn't afford to put the heating on. A 'Keep Warm Keep Well' information pack led to him contacting Age UK County Durham for help in December 2017. The Case Workers helped him claim benefits he didn't know he was entitled to. He can now afford heating and food, and is now enjoying a warm, cosy home and feels well for the first time in years.

*"My family and I have had a bit of a rough time over the last couple of years. I used to own a business and a house, and I was married. A few years on and everything has gone through a sequence of unfortunate events such as betrayal, depression, redundancy and ill health.*

*At 41, I find myself relying on benefits with 3 children, and with elderly and quite poorly parents to look after. I'm a bit stubborn and don't like to ask for help, I do my best and struggle on.*

*Anyway, I have today watched my 3-year-old parade around the house wearing the new blanket like a superman cape, and pleased my teenage daughter with Schumann chicken dinner. My 1-year-old loves spicy food so will love it at lunch tomorrow (was in bed when it was cooked).*

*I was embarrassed to come today but needed the blankets and food desperately, handily you are on the way to my Mum's, so it didn't cost any petrol money. I've learnt to live with what we have but with birthdays and Christmas and an unexpected house move (twice in six months!) we have struggled.*

*Thanks so much to the wonderful people that run the Beyond Limits and volunteer there - arriving for my blankets today I was still embarrassed but the lady I met was so lovely. I was so surprised by the place and the friendliness. You guys are amazing, and I see you do so much for so many. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."*

## Looking Forward

- Deprivation in County Durham is higher than the national average with 29% of the county's population, including 20,000 of the county's children, living in poverty
- 28.1% of households are lone parent households with dependent children
- Against an English average of 2.5%, almost 14% of working age people in Hartlepool are receiving Universal Credit
- In County Durham fuel poverty has, in places, reached 15% (4% higher than the English average)
- In Stanley, County Durham 26.7% of pensioners live in poverty – nearly double the number compared to numbers for England

The Foundation is proud of the incredible impact achieved by the organisations we support across County Durham and Darlington, all made possible thanks to the support of donors to the Winter Warmth Fund.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, the Foundation awarded over £5.5 million in grant funding to groups who used the funds to meet needs in their local communities, improve the facilities in their towns and villages, and create a better county. The Winter Warmth Fund was a key part in this process. Without funds like this, the Foundation would have been unable to meet as many of the specific needs of local communities.

But there is much more to do to strengthen and support our region's communities, to enable them to become confident and to thrive. We want to help more organisations tackle systemic, structural and cultural disadvantage by funding and investing in projects that help their communities shape their own environment. We also want to help organisations reach those who are most isolated.

By launching our Winter Warmth fund in 2018 we are hoping to help those who become further disadvantaged by winter weather winter to keep warm; to thrive not just survive.

We know that often relatively small investments targeting the right areas can have a big impact on individuals and communities. We invite you to explore with us how you might continue to make a difference to the lives of local people.