Home Adaptations for Disabled People

Good Practice Case Study: West of England
Facts about the area

**Locality:** West of England (Bath and North-East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset), South West England

**Type of authority:** Three unitary authorities

**Population:** c1 million

**Description:** The area includes the cities of Bristol and Bath, the coastal and market towns and rural villages. Although the area is relatively affluent compared to the country as a whole there are pockets of deprivation, poor housing, concentrations of disadvantaged older households and issues of rural isolation.

**Health and Disability:** Many of the health issues for the area mirror the national picture. In Bristol, more than 1 in 5 of older people (over 60) live in income-deprived households. There are also health inequalities experienced by specific groups of disabled people, such as people with learning difficulties, mental health issues or sensory impairments, as well as for carers.

**Good practice illustrates:**

* Pioneer Centre for Independent Living
* Completely integrated and co-located service with pooled budgets
* Effective joint working across housing, social care and health
* Promotion of independent living solutions in visible environment
* User involvement
Home adaptations service at a glance

WE Care and Repair is an independent, not for profit home improvement agency providing information and advice; handyperson service; needs assessment; caseworker and technical support. As well as employing an occupational therapist (OT) all relevant staff are trained as Trusted Assessors.

The agency secured the West of England HIA contract from April 2013 enabling a consistent, high quality service to be developed across the sub-region. Prior to the start of the contract and following a successful bid for health funding WE C&R developed its’ first home independence centre, the Waterloo Centre, within its existing base in central Bristol. Since then the agency has developed a further centre in West-super-Mare (Motex Centre).

The centres are used for carrying out needs assessments (both by the agency's OT and also local authority OTs), delivering training for professionals and running ‘thinking ahead’ & awareness raising workshops for older people, as well as their function as a showroom, demonstrating a wide range of equipment and accessibility features including high specification wet rooms. Small items of equipment are sold from the centres generating a small profit for reinvestment in the core agency as well as enabling customers to benefit immediately from solutions they have found at the centre.

The home independence centres are designed to enable home owners to make best use of their own resources to improve the accessibility of their homes before they start experiencing difficulties. Customers can obtain expert, impartial advice about features in homes that enable independent living which is not available from most bathroom and kitchen suppliers. The Waterloo Centre has a shop showroom layout with room settings.

The centres include high quality, aesthetically pleasing examples of accessible bathroom and kitchen fixtures giving self-funders ideas for designs that they would chose to install in their homes. The room settings and uncluttered environment give customers a real feel for how features will look in their own homes and allows them to try things out before they make a decision. This is not about the minimum that can be provided with public funding – instead it gives the customer real choice about the best solutions for their future needs.
The agency is contracted to provide this range of services by the unitary authority areas. WE C&R secures further funding from other statutory, non-statutory and charitable sources. The building housing the Motex centre was provided by North Somerset Council. Funding to carry out building work necessary to create the centres was provided by WE C&R and most of the fittings and equipment were provided by retail suppliers.

Although WE C&R provides a technical agency service funded by fee income based on a percentage of the contract sum for each scheme, only two of the authorities use this service. Bristol City manages simple DFG funded schemes such as stairlifts and level access showers in house using framework contracts. WE C&R has developed a commercial agency service, Enterprises, which offers a full design and build service to people funding their own housing adaptations and repairs. During 2014 WE C&R has also developed a Contracting Team to provide an alternative option to the private contractors on the approved list given to customers.
How we work

Most customers approach the service by telephone and over 20,000 enquiries are made annually. The number of people visiting the home independence centres has increased year on year with around 2,000 visitors recorded during 2014/15.

Initial enquiries are handled by staff well trained in gathering information from customers to identify their needs and providing basic advice. The vast majority of calls (around 10,000) result in a handyperson service being ordered by the adviser and an appointment made at that point. Where the situation is more complex advisers refer customers to a case worker or OT.

Nearly 1,000 OT assessments are made at the home independence centres and over 2,000 people are supported to remain living independently by the agency caseworkers annually. Of these around 800 have some practical work carried out to their homes with only 160 of these are funded through DFG.

In addition to supporting people to make changes to their homes, caseworkers also advise and help people to obtain benefits that they are entitled to – during the first three quarters of 2014/15 they raised £84,281 on behalf of customers.

WE C&R has a reputation as an innovator. It was the first agency in the country to offer a housing options information and advice service with ‘move on’ practical support for people who wanted to leave their current home to move somewhere more suitable. It’s groundbreaking ‘Healthy Homes Assessment’ Training for a wide range of professionals across health, social care and housing represents integration in action.

It has been a pioneer in promoting self help and volunteering with its ‘Silverlinks’ scheme whereby older people who have faced and resolved housing issues share their personal experience and offer information to those facing similar situations. This service also runs workshops where people are encouraged to think and plan ahead for their later life living arrangements.
Malachy McReynolds, Chief Executive of WE C&R said

“There has been a major shift in the funding streams used by our customers in recent years. With public expenditure on a seemingly irreversible downward trend, we have had to adapt to a world where self-funders and loan schemes will be of greater importance to the sector. This shift carries risks, but has two major benefits - it enables us to serve clients who would otherwise have to fend for themselves and it generates income to support our other services. We are developing links into health service providers and continually seeking to increase other hospital discharge related activities. A safe, suitable home is absolutely critical to safe discharge and prevention of readmission. Inclusion of our practical services and allocation of funds to deliver these as part of the new integration agenda will be critical.”
What we’ve achieved:

Customers of WE C&R are routinely asked for feedback about the services provided by the agency as well as the impact of the service on their health and wellbeing. Over 90% of respondents are satisfied with the service and nearly all say that the service has helped them to live independently.

Families needing adaptations to their homes to accommodate a disabled child appreciate the holistic approach taken to addressing the child’s needs within the home whilst considering the families ability to cope more generally and exploring innovative funding options to achieve this.

Lindsay Hay, Service Manager for WE C&R said:

“This year we have helped several families to cope better with caring for disabled children. Master W has arrested development and is unable to breathe unaided. He lives with his parents and siblings. He required accessible bathing and sleeping facilities, space for his breathing apparatus, wheel chair access and safe surfaces throughout the family home. As options for creating facilities within the existing footprint of the home were limited, a ground floor bedroom/bathroom extension was created. We worked closely with the family, the OT as well as planning/building control, a structural engineer and contractors to develop a scheme that would work for the whole family. The family received a DFG of £30,000 and contributed savings of £7,500.

In another case we supported Master P, a disabled child living with his parents and older brother, who requires a wheel chair at all times to move around and needs help with transfers. He needed accessible bathing facilities and separate sleeping space with ceiling hoists. Options to move home were discussed with the family as their house was small, but this would not have been possible to achieve financially. Even with DFG funding to help fund the move, the options for purchasing an alternative suitable property were very limited. Through careful, creative design and close working with the family and contractors we managed to keep the cost of adaptations in the home within the £30,000 DFG limit. In addition £1,500 of charitable funding was raised to create a access to the garden and a safe garden surface.

This is money very well spent - compared with the high ongoing weekly costs if children or young people have to move to specialist accommodation the savings are huge.”
For more good practice case studies and further information about home adaptations go to homeadaptationsconsortium.wordpress.com

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