

FirstStop Advice receives first accolade

An innovative advice service for older people and their families has gained a ringing endorsement after an independent evaluation by researchers from Cambridge University's Centre for Housing & Planning Research (CCHPR).

FirstStop Advice brings together a number of national and local information and advice agencies, pooling their expertise to deliver a joint service through one national phone number and website, but retaining face-to-face contact at local level for those who need or prefer this.

Its remit spans the range of issues that older people may need to address if they are to successfully maintain independence, comfort and quality of life at home – including housing, care and support and the financial aspects of both. John Galvin of FirstStop explains that they take a broad approach to this, led by the needs of individual clients. “Our advisors know what can be done to make homes safer, warmer or more manageable and how to organise a bit of help with odd jobs, housework, gardening or shopping. They can put people in touch with a local home improvement agency to help them with repairs or adaptations. They can also help older people get care if they need it, or explain what's on offer in local sheltered and retirement housing complexes, retirement villages and other forms of housing for later life. And we deal with the money side of things too, advising on state benefits and linking in to a panel of selected independent financial advisors for specialist financial advice.”

Launched by four national organisations a year and a half ago, with backing from the Big Lottery Fund, FirstStop is now expanding to involve home improvement agencies (HIAs), older people's groups and in some areas, local authorities, in a joint push to make sure that all older people can access good quality information and advice around housing, support and care wherever they live. Foundations, the national body for HIAs, is supporting and promoting the initiative amongst HIAs whilst Care & Repair England is delivering a wide range of training courses and workshops and supporting a network of local housing options exemplar services.

The expansion of FirstStop is backed by the Communities and Local Government department, as part of its Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society, and parallels an expansion of local handyperson services. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at CLG, Lord Bill McKenzie, welcomed the report. “Older people have made clear for many years that they would value a good quality, personal service to help them ensure that their living environment works well for them as they age, and to organise any help or support they need. I am very encouraged that this initial research shows that FirstStop Advice is shaping up to provide that service effectively.”

The research was led by Dr Gemma Burgess for CCHPR, and covered the first 8 months of FirstStop's expansion programme.

FirstStop Advice: 0800 377 70 70 and www.firststopadvice.org.uk

Evaluation report downloadable from:

www.firststopadvice.org.uk

www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk

www.housingcare.org

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