

FirstStop Training Programme Evaluation

November 2012

FirstStop

FirstStop Advice is an independent, free service offering advice and information for older people, their families and carers about housing and care options in later life funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It is led by the charity Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) working in partnership with other national and local organisations. FirstStop delivers information and advice through a national telephone helpline and website. FirstStop began as a pilot service in August 2008 and was funded by DCLG to go national in 2009.

FirstStop has also seed-funded a number of local information and advice services. These local projects aim to raise the profile of housing options for older people in their area and to provide a face to face case work service to older people. The case work is a mixture of information and advice provision and more intense case work to assist older people in resolving their housing and care problems.

A training programme about housing options for older people was delivered by FirstStop in 2010/11 through Care & Repair England through face to face training, short workshops, a cascade model of training, supporting local exemplar projects to deliver workshops, training locally and production of a set of web-based self training materials. In the financial year 2011/2012 the training programme was expanded, Care & Repair England continues to provide training and FirstStop also now has an in-house training manager to deliver training to professionals within the sector.

An evaluation of FirstStop is being conducted by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) at the University of Cambridge. For the evaluation reports to date please visit <http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/>. This report reflects on the training programme to May 2012.

The training programme

The aim of the training was to develop a national programme of training for professional advisers, non-specialists and older people on the subject of housing options advice and information for older people.

The training programme in 2010/2011

The key aims of the training programme in the financial year 2010/11 were:

- to deliver face to face training for over 1,000 people
- to produce and promote online self training materials

The training was deemed necessary for a number of reasons:

- To increase local capacity among providers of related housing services to enable them to offer a better level of advice and information to older people about housing options in later life

- To raise awareness of the help that FirstStop can offer and to promote its availability to a wider audience
- To increase understanding among people whose work / volunteer role brings them into contact with older people who are facing housing difficulties or choices so that they can be both a source of information and support, as well as being able to pass on information about FirstStop
- To raise awareness among older people of their housing and care choices in later life, to stimulate discussion and hopefully encourage more people to think and plan ahead

The evaluation established that the target to deliver face to face training to over 1,000 people in the financial year 2011/12 was exceeded and had already reached 1,800 people through various means by the end of the third quarter. It provided training about housing options for older people to both service providers and older people and raised the profile of the FirstStop service. Care & Repair England ran full day courses focused on professional and volunteer advisors and half day workshops which were primarily aimed at older people, activists and volunteers. Feedback from the participants was very positive:

“This was a most worthwhile and useful workshop, would highly recommend it”.

“There is a lot of help and information available. These events help to make them known to the public. Excellent.”

“Very good event.”

“Excellent presentation by the lady in charge all day.”

The training programme in 2011/2012

The aim for Care & Repair England in the financial year 2011/12 was to undertake training and awareness raising related activities including:

1. Provide housing options/ FirstStop awareness raising training for older people, community activists and volunteers who are involved in their neighbourhoods and communities e.g. via tenants and residents groups, faith groups, Forums and Action groups.
2. Provide face to face FirstStop linked housing options for older people training and workshops for specialist and non-specialist providers of advice and information for older people.
3. Develop, update and promote FirstStop web-based self training packages to be made accessible via the FirstStop and related websites.

The FirstStop in-house training manager is working with professionals, volunteers and other people who come into contact with older people. The training is a combination of working with local partners of the FirstStop initiative and other organisations working in the sector. FirstStop is also developing a charged for training package.

The local partner training has two aspects. One is to go to meet with the local partners when they first join the initiative and explain a little about FirstStop, the requirements of the scheme and the data monitoring system. Partners learn about the self-training manual and referral procedures. The training manager has also conducted housing options training with several local partners.

FirstStop also provides housing options training to other organisations and/or gives talks to raise awareness of FirstStop e.g. to the Lewisham Pensioners' Housing Group. This is provided without charge. It is normally not formal training but is more awareness raising

about FirstStop and what housing options are available in the form of short talks and appearance at events.

The training is monitored as three different aspects:

1. Training to partners
2. Direct housing options training
3. Awareness raising

The main focus is now on developing a charged for service as having training as an income stream is important to the FirstStop funding model going forward. The training programme has been developed and the brochure lists available courses. The training is done in two ways. One is in-house; the other is as individual bookings. The FirstStop advice team are being included in the training so one member will come to the training sessions and cascade back to the team to help the advice team to fill gaps in their knowledge and to stay up to date.

Number of participants

The target for the training programme in 2011/12 was:

- To deliver FirstStop training to over 1,000 people including at least 500 by traditional, professional face-to-face methods and 500 involving peer-to-peer mentoring, web-based self-service and other innovations.

The reporting for DCLG showed that the overall target of over 1000 people had been reached by the end of the third quarter:

- The totals, combining both Care and Repair England and the FirstStop in-house training manager's work for the first three quarters, are: 1,026 people involved in peer support and other related activities, 349 attending workshops, 319 receiving face to face training and raising awareness of FirstStop with a further 106 people, making 1,800 in all.

The intention is for the training to raise awareness beyond the actual participants through a cascade effect where participants pass on what they learnt at the training events to colleagues and friends. Care & Repair England, a seasoned provider of training to the sector, estimates (based on speaking to delegates and the number of extra brochures and leaflets that were taken by delegates to pass on) that each person would pass on information to 10 other people.

Feedback from users

Participants in the Care & Repair England training are asked to complete a feedback form at the end of the session. A sample of feedback forms was analysed. 100% of those who completed the feedback said that they would recommend the training to other people and the majority gave the course a 4 or 5 out of 5 score:

“This was a most worthwhile and useful workshop, would highly recommend it”.

The local partners who received training from the FirstStop in-house training manager responded very positively. The partners were asked to comment on their relationship with FirstStop and how they could be offered more support. Many of the partners specifically mentioned the training in their feedback:

“Over the last 15 months we have build up an excellent relationship with FirstStop staff, especially the Training Manager and also members of the Advice Team. We have been impressed with their professional can do and caring approach to all aspects of working together. We are delighted to be working in partnership with FirstStop and wish for this to continue our partnership, and to deliver an excellent service to older people, and provide sound advice and information on housing and care options. The current resources and support you provide help us to make this service real and manageable”.

“Our relationship with FirstStop thus far has been productive and supportive as has been evidenced by the successful launch and development of the partnership service. We have been provided with excellent support for training, advice, marketing and promotion from FirstStop. You have provided access to information leaflets for clients and we have been impressed by the level of information and support available to both staff and client via the FirstStop web site, data bases and ongoing support provided by the team at FirstStop.”

“We feel the relationship has worked quite well. The training sessions have been useful and the website very helpful”.

“As an organisation we see housing in general, and advice and information on housing issues, as essential in us achieving our aim for local older people of making, ‘later life a greater life’. We recognise the previous support FirstStop has provided to us in raising the profile of housing issues for older people locally, and as an important resource for our advisors and local people”.

The feedback from participants who received training on housing options in group sessions from the FirstStop in-house training manager was positive. Participants were asked to comment on how they will use the information in their work:

“More aware of the resources available – website will be of great help when we receive enquiries from clients.”

“To signpost older people and their families.”

“On a daily basis when we visit our clients to enable us to give them more choice and options.”

“I feel more able to advise people and put them in the right direction when they have issues about moving.”

Participants were also asked to comment on what they found useful about the session. For some this was a refresher seminar of knowledge they were already familiar with, for others the housing options information was new, and for many it was useful to learn about the resources available through FirstStop:

“It was all very useful – the website is a good tool and is very interesting.”

“Staying put and moving home information as this is something new to us.”

“The session about equity release. This has always been a bit of a mystery so it was good to have things clarified a little”.

“Very useful to both myself to give advice and to the customer to be able to assist themselves.”

Several people found it useful to be able to talk to others working in a similar field and commented on how they had benefitted from learning from other participants:

“Overall was very interesting. Also learnt a lot from the other participants.”

Participants were asked to give an estimate of how many people they think will benefit over the next year from the knowledge they have gained on housing options and FirstStop and numbers varied up to 8000 where the participant was working on a telephone advice line. There is evidence of a cascade effect as participants not only use their newly acquired knowledge to give advice to clients, but pass on information to colleagues:

“I will pass on the information I have obtained to my colleagues and advise them to look at the website and take part in the training module.”

Successes and challenges

One clear success has been the number of people reached by the training and awareness raising activities.

For the in-house FirstStop training a further success has been the development of the brochure for the charged for training programme. It is wide ranging and took a lot of thought about what would be needed in all the different courses. Some of these are specialist courses which require in depth knowledge to put together.

The training manager finds the training and making people more aware of their options very rewarding. She reported that in most cases it is new information for people. In particular, few people have heard about FirstStop and what the service can offer.

The training with organisations has helped them to develop into wider housing options services. For example, by helping Home Improvement Agencies which have only looked at staying put options for older people to instead consider a wider range of options. Training can be a catalyst for organisations to see the potential to develop.

Care & Repair England identified the rapidly changing operating environment as the most problematic issue with regard to delivery of useful, up to date housing options workshops for older people. This changing landscape can also make it harder for the peer to peer advisers to keep up to date and pass on information which is current.

The housing and care options which are available to older people are changing rapidly and becoming more locally variable i.e. closure of local housing care and support services, changes to housing benefit and other welfare reforms, cessation of private sector housing repairs services and reductions in help with home adaptations are often resulting in contraction of older people's housing and care options. This does mean that regular update training sessions or local workshops for sharing information about changes are going to become increasingly important.

The in-house FirstStop training manager identified the biggest challenge to be finding the necessary volume of customers to pay for training.

“It is finding a way to convince people of the benefits of training to their organisation and making the links with people”.

The main focus is developing the charged for package through marketing. The target for how much income the training ought to generate is £20,000 for the 2012/2013 financial year which is a sizeable target.

Care & Repair England believe that enabling older people to help themselves and to pass on information to other older people (given the contraction of locally funded advice and information services) should be the focus of workshops and training. In the medium to longer term training for established staff who work with older people in more secure posts (though these are decline too) such as the health service will be a priority in order to help to deliver on the vision for greater health and social care integration.

For the training conducted by Care & Repair England, the peer to peer work has been slow but is the most promising.

At this stage in the evaluation, FirstStop did not have all of the monitoring arrangements in place to be able to fully evaluate all aspects of the training programme. The monitoring is being developed and the training programme will be subject to further evaluation in nine months time.

For more information

The reports from the evaluation to date can be found at:

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk>

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