

WINTER SQUADS EVALUATION REPORT 2012



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Winter Squads Evaluation Report 2012

During a three month period from 1st January 2012 a project known as “Winter Squads” was delivered in East Durham.

The project was managed by East Durham Trust, the local Voluntary and Community Sector support organisation and was funded directly by Durham County Council High Ways Department.

Essentially the aim of the project was to mobilize community volunteers to support vulnerable people during periods of adverse weather conditions.

This evaluation is intended to reflect:

- The background to the project
- The methods of delivery
- The impact
- The added value
- Retrospective analysis
- Focus on detail: 2 case studies

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1. Acknowledgements

The Winter Squads 2012 project benefitted significant numbers of residents in East Durham but would not have been possible without the support of the following individuals:

- Alison Paterson
- Rev. Jenny Pride
- Hayley Hood
- Jim Naylor
- Irene Waller
- Denise Brooks and Rona Hardy
- Margaret Girvan
- Barry Bates
- The individual Winter Squad 2012 volunteers

2. Background

The two previous winters in County Durham had seen significant snow fall and adverse weather conditions affecting communities. As a response to this, the project forerunner of Winter Squads – Snow Squads - was developed in East Durham. The Snow Squads project involved a small group of community based volunteers, supported by a community activist / coordinator, coming together in their community to clear and grit paths, enable access to key services locally e.g. shops, local GP surgery and the Post Office and to provide support to vulnerable, isolated or elderly residents.

The Snow Squads pilot, run in four communities initially, evaluated well in winter 2010-11, with funding bodies supporting the project providing further funding to extend the reach of the project in winter 2011-12. Hence the Winter Squads 2012 project was born.



Above: Trimdon Grange Winter Squad 2012 volunteers trying on their kit.

3. The Delivery Model

3.1 Recruitment

The recruitment process for the project initially involved extending the opportunity for involvement to East Durham Trust member groups. Community groups who could identify a local coordinator and offer a meeting space, as well as having the ability to recruit volunteers, could put themselves forward for the project, and those groups that had been involved in the previous Snow Squads pilot, along with other new groups, did so. It is worth noting that no organisation wishing to be involved in this project was turned away and in total eight community organisations in East Durham identified themselves as wishing to deliver the Winter Squads 2012 project.

These organisations were:

- Blackhall Community Association
- Thornley Methodist Church
- Eastlea Community Centre
- Shotton Partnership 2000
- East Durham Play and Community Network
- Spyral
- Haswell and District Mencap
- Hesleden Community Centre

"I didn't know what to expect when I joined the group. Elderly people stop me in the street now to have a chat, I feel great that I can help out when I can."

Philip, Shotton Winter Squad 2012 Volunteer

3.2 Model

It was agreed that each of the community organisations above would embrace the following themes in their roll out of the Winter Squads 2012 project:

- Four volunteers to be recruited in each area
- Each group would have a base or meeting place
- The volunteers would be offered professional training
- Each group would meet regularly and decide a plan of action
- Each group would establish a list of vulnerable people in their own neighbourhood
- The groups would 'log' details of all supportive contacts
- The groups would share information about other services available with individuals they came into contact with and signpost / refer them onto another service where this was the individuals' preferred choice

Whilst the primary function of the project was to clear snow, grit paths etc it was expected that the support provided to individuals would vary significantly and it was up to volunteers supervised by local community coordinators to decide how this could be best delivered in their community.

“Volunteering has given me a “BUZZ”, knowing that I am making a difference to people’s lives in my own community.”

Margaret Girvan, formerly of East Durham Play & Community Network (folded June 2012)

3.3 Funding

Funding secured by East Durham Trust for the Winter Squad 2012 project covered the following key aspects for delivery:

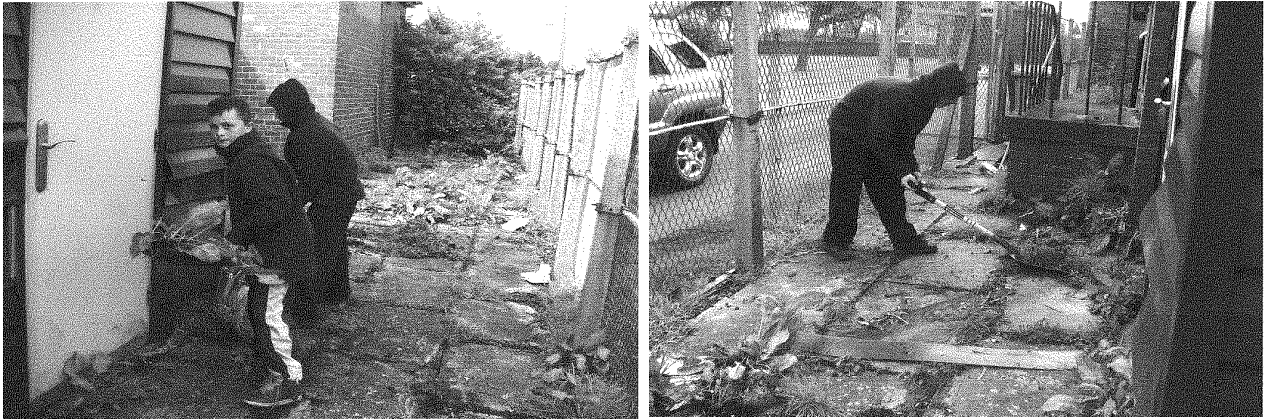
- Launch / promotion / stationery / telephone
- Equipment / protective clothing
- Consumables (grit)
- Room hire
- Liability insurance
- Training
- Travel
- Volunteer Expenses
- Management / coordination fee

In communities where Snow Squads had been established the year previous, key items of equipment remained so protective clothing, spades and snow shovels were only purchased for community organisations new to delivering Winter Squads 2012. Grit was purchased for each community and training was offered to each group in both volunteering and manual handling and lifting in preparation for both the practical and support work they were to embark upon.

3.4 Volunteer Recruitment

Key to the delivery of the Winter Squad 2012 project was the recruitment of local volunteers. Community organisations participating in the project were asked to recruit their own volunteers, four in total, from their respective communities. Volunteers were recruited into the project in a range of different ways with each organisation using its own network to advertise the opportunity for involvement.

Volunteers recruited to the project ranged in age from 11 years old (and supervised!) to those aged 60+. Clearly volunteers still of school age could only help out at weekends and / or after school or during school holidays but the desire to get involved and play their part was no less than other community members.



Hesleden Winter Squad 2012 volunteers hard at work making the outside space of the Community Centre usable by all including Guides, Brownies and the local WI group

In total, more than 30 volunteers were recruited to the Winter Squad 2012 project, contributing a significant number of hours to the total number of volunteer hours in East Durham during the 2011-12 financial year.



Above Left: Philip and Sarah: Shotton Winter Squad 2012 volunteers

4. Training

Part of the commitment to volunteers involved in the Winter Squad 2012 project was to ensure they were well trained for their role. The training was specifically adapted for the role of Winter Squad volunteers and covered three main themes:

- Induction to volunteering: Including legal implications, CRB checks, support available from the East Durham Trust Volunteer Centre;
- Manual handling: Designed to cover the aspects of snow clearance etc and delivered by an HSE approved tutor;
- Referral information and protocols: Volunteers were given a range of information and guidance around services and agencies that would benefit individuals as well as a selection of 'Do's and Don'ts' when dealing with vulnerable people.



Above Left: Haswell Winter Squad and above right Trimdon Grange Winter Squad 2012 receiving their manual handling and lifting training.

Due to the diversity of the organisations involved in the project, and the availability of their respective volunteers, it was agreed that this training should be delivered to Winter Squads on an out-reach basis. Furthermore, community organisations that had participated in the Snow Squads 2010/11 pilot and had retained some of those volunteers for the Winter Squads 2012 project, would be able to access refresher training, more in line with their needs.

- 6 hours of certified training was delivered to new volunteers
- A training handbook for further personal study was allocated to every volunteer

5. Delivery Models

All eight participating community organisations approached the project in slightly different ways. Much of the approach was dictated by the availability of the volunteers which varied from group to group and indeed volunteer to volunteer and the priorities agreed with the local coordinator.

As with the Snow Squads in the year previous, East Durham Trust was not over prescriptive with the groups in recognition of the fact that the project was by nature developmental and there was a learning element expected. However, what we found was that organisations that had previously delivered the Snow Squads pilot, and those that had not, used the learning from the pilot to inform their preparation and practice in relation to the delivery of Winter Squads 2012.

There was however, an element that no-one could predict, that could and did influence the manner in which the Winter Squads 2012 project was delivered – the weather! After two previous winters where significant snowfall, exacerbated by rain and freezing temperatures lead to incredibly difficult conditions underfoot, impacting on communities in East Durham as well as County Durham as a whole, winter 2011 /2012 was much milder. Whilst not without its issues and difficulties for vulnerable, isolated or elderly residents, snow and ice were not the issues they had been previously.



Left: Robert Burns, Eastlea Winter Squad 2012 volunteer delivers a hot meal to Nancy.

Winter Squads 2012 however, continued to both monitor the weather and be ready to respond to community needs. Several Squads made the decision that in light of the conditions, they would adapt their delivery model accordingly. The key theme of Winter Squads 2012 was supporting and addressing the needs of vulnerable, isolated or elderly residents so adaptations were made to ensure this continued to be central to their project delivery. Examples of project delivery include:

- A befriending / home visiting / advocacy service
- Hot meal provision service
- A garden tidying service
- A fruit and vegetable delivery service
- A combination of several of the above

Most 2012 Winter Squads chose to meet weekly with individual volunteers helping out where they saw a need in between times, although some Squads delivering meals did so twice weekly.

“We delivered meals to one elderly resident and she said that as her neighbour also had meals delivered they sometimes dined together which gave them the opportunity to have a chat and break up their day.”

Irene Waller, Finance Officer,
Eastlea Community Centre

6. Impact

Between the eight groups over **342** separate **episodes of support** took place during the lifespan of the project.

30 volunteers were recruited.

13 new Winter Squad volunteers were trained.

93 individuals were directly assisted by way of one or more of the following and on one or more occasion:

- Home visit
- Hot meal provided / delivered
- Shopping collected
- Garden tidied, weeds dug out and garden waste bagged up and disposed of
- Medical appointment card retrieved
- Laundry hung out / brought in
- Home / community property repairs reported
- Anti-social behaviour reported including speeding and dog fouling
- Fruit and vegetables delivered
- Carbon monoxide monitors requested
- Support to prevent un-solicited sales calls on home telephone line (access to telephone preference service)
- Support with form filling
- Transport information sought
- Photocopying

Right: Michael and Andrew, Eastlea Winter Squad 2012 volunteers, lopping overgrown shrubs for Theresa.



Although some of the above instances may appear relatively minor, it is clear from the Winter Squad 2012 reports that they had a major impact upon the personal circumstances of the individual beneficiaries. Indeed laundry being hung on or taken off the washing line becomes more challenging when there are broken bones and crutches involved and the help and support offered by a member of the Shotton Winter Squad 2012 team, kept the individual safe and meant that the task at hand was completed. Similarly a cake wouldn't taste quite the same without the filling, especially when a lack of dexterity makes a jam jar impossible to open! Therefore it could be concluded that Winter Squad 2012 volunteers enabled vulnerable individuals to maintain their independence in their respective communities. However, maintaining independence is not to be confused with reinforcing isolation.

"I look forward to the meals being delivered as the person delivering the meal is the first person I've seen all day."

Mrs Carr, resident of Shotton Colliery

7. Added Value

The Winter Squads 2012 project certainly included some unintended outcomes. Whilst the project proposal concentrated on snow clearance it soon became clear that the majority of the vulnerable and socially excluded people with whom the project was coming into contact were vulnerable regardless of the weather conditions and their needs were varied, (see the examples listed under 'Impact' section of this report).

Significant and valuable additional outcomes of the project can be found in the form of the post- project legacy, these include:

- More communities retaining equipment for clearing snow for **community use**
- **Increased social cohesion** in communities with links being built between different sections of the community e.g. volunteers and vulnerable / elderly / vulnerable residents including intergenerational activity.

"The young people who delivered my fruit and vegetables were very polite."

Margaret Burns, resident in Blackhall

- The trained volunteers; all of whom have enhanced their personal CVs with some going on to other **volunteering opportunities** or **paid employment**
- More members of the community becoming aware of opportunities for improved health locally e.g. **food co-ops** operating within some Winter Squad 2012 bases which have seen an **increase in the number of customers** using the co-op as a result of the Winter Squad 2012 project

"Our Winter Squad 2012 project included the delivery of hot meals to vulnerable and elderly residents in the Haswell Community. What we found though, was that more and more people we delivered to, wanted to come into the Community Cafe to eat as then they got the benefit of social contact with one another. Then they became aware that we ran the food co-op and started ordering fruit and veg from there too."

Hayley Hood, Haswell & District Mencap

- The contribution to the continued **sustainability of the community buildings** used as bases. This came not only in the simple form of room rental for the bases but also the contact between volunteers and isolated individuals which often led to **awareness raising** of **community activity** that people signed up to.

"I have made some new friends and it has made me feel more confident within the community. I also feel happy helping the people who need it... as .. some residents have no or little family nearby to help at winter time..."

Hayley Ovington, Trimdon Grange Winter Squad 2012 Volunteer

8. Lessons Learnt

This year, due to the Winter Squads delivering modified versions of the original Snow Squad model, it was apparent that vulnerability and social exclusion are not solely the result of bad weather as many of the people who were supported during the project are vulnerable 'all of the time.' Certainly the evidence above makes a case for a year round model of this project, connecting communities and supporting social capital and increased community cohesion.

9. Focus on Detail

Case Study One: East Durham Play and Community Network

Beneficiary: Mr Church

What did you do?

Mr Church had seen the leaflet advertising the Trimdon Grange Winter Squad 2012 project and had rung the number given to ask if someone could pay him a visit. He explained that he needed help getting a complaint to his social housing provider regarding damp in his home.

Winter Squad volunteers arranged to visit Mr Church and took photographs and video evidence of the damp. They also took details regarding the social housing provider and confirmed they would contact the provider and request that an inspector call to assess the damp at the property.

How did this help?

Winter Squad volunteers supported Mr Church, listened to his concerns and acted to get a member of staff from the social housing provider out to the property to assess the issue. This meant that Mr Church could then raise his concerns directly and hopefully for the issue to be resolved.

Quotes from individual supported

“Thank you so much for your help.”

Case Study Two: Shotton Community Centre

Who you helped: Residents from Alcote Grove

What did you do?

Residents from Alcote Grove were having problems with young people congregating around her back door, under the canopy roof. Residents from Alcote Grove wanted to attend the Residents' Group to discuss her concerns with the Police. As a Winter Squad 2012 volunteer Residents from Alcote Grove asked if the squad could support them. A Winter Squad Volunteer brought some of the Alcote House residents to the local Residents' meeting so that they could discuss the matter in full.

A meeting was set up in Alcote House with other residents and a Resident Agreement was signed. During the dark nights an individual within Alcote House was given a mobile telephone number to call if she was in any difficulty and to call this as well as the Police. The Winter Squad volunteer would then visit and support and has continued to offer this support beyond the end of the project. Residents of Alcote Grove have been visited regularly as part of the Winter Squad 2012 and this helped them to feel less vulnerable.

How did this help?

Following attendance at the Residents Meeting the Police were aware of the issues with the young people and maintained an active patrol. The canopy was removed after discussions with the housing association.

Quotes from Individuals Supported

"Thank you, we couldn't have done it without you!"

Press Coverage

/13/12

Winter wonders hailed nationally - Community - Peterlee Star

Peterlee STAR

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Winter wonders hailed nationally



SNOW SQUAD: East Durham Trust chief executive Malcolm Fallow with Blackhall Community Centre manager Alison Paterson, who were heavily involved in last years winter scheme

Published on **Tuesday 15 November 2011 14:00**

THE outstanding work of a community-based organisation in tackling last year's deep freeze has been highlighted as a beacon in a national campaign.

The East Durham Trust-led Snow Squads project that helped protect the elderly and vulnerable during one of the worst winters on record has been rolled out nationally.

Last year's project saw the recruitment and training of four teams of four volunteers to look out for isolated people.

The hardy volunteers were based in Blackhall, Thornley, Shotton Colliery and Murton.

During a three-month period, more than 300 hot meals were delivered to the homes of local residents having been prepared in community cafes.

Now one of the chosen villages, Blackhall, has featured prominently during the national Winter Relief Appeal, an extension of the good work being done in east Durham which is backed by famous faces including Terry Wogan and has featured on TV and radio.

Malcolm Fallow, chief executive of East Durham Trust, which is based in Yoden Road, in Peterlee, said: "We are delighted that the work we piloted last year has been held in sufficiently high regard as to be rolled out in this way.

"We look forward to being involved to the benefit of local people again this year."

During last year's project, Good Samaritans were provided with vital clothing and equipment as well as basic training in how to respond to individuals in crisis due to the problems created by snow and ice.

Part of the volunteers' work was to meet regularly during the bad weather to plan local programmes of snow clearance and pavement treating as well as sharing local knowledge of who was likely to be isolated and vulnerable and how they could help.

As well as clearing snow, the help also ranged from simple contact with people over a cup of tea to ensuring vital supplies got through and trips to doctors or chemists were made.

New arrangements to keep County Durham moving during winter weather are to be outlined this week. Members of Durham County Council's cabinet will be asked to approve the winter maintenance plan, which sets out how the authority will tackle gritting, snow clearing and the management salt stocks during the coming winter.

Current salt stocks have been increased by 6,000 tonnes to 46,000 tonnes and there are 2,000 salt bins countywide with an additional 200 available if a request is made.

The number of farmer contractors has also been extended to 60 in total, an increase of 17 on last year and all of these contractors can deploy tractor trailers, tractor ploughs and loading shovels when the need arises.

www.peterleestar.co.uk/community/winter-wonders-hailed-nationally-1-3968340