

# Case study: Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service provides vital assistance for disabled and older customers



## Assisting vulnerable customers

Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) knows that people aged over 75 living alone are at increased risk of fires in their homes. Those who are known to have social care needs may be more at risk because of their care needs. That's why NFRS has been working with the local County Council in order to provide a joined up service for older people living in the area.

NFRS has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council whereby the Social Care Customer Contact Centre contacts all registered social care clients about whether they would like a free home safety check from NFRS and possible smoke alarm fitting. For those that say yes, the Fire and Rescue Service visits their home.

As a result, data collected in the Ashfield area shows a significant reduction in the number of fires in that district. The project is now being rolled out area by area throughout the County.

## Adapting services

Continuing in this partnership theme, NFRS has been working with occupational therapists that work with older adults with mental and cognitive needs from the local NHS Healthcare Trust. They have jointly produced a booklet specifically to help adults with memory needs given that statistics show that this group of people are at most risk of fire.

NFRS realised through working with the occupational therapists that the way in which it provided free home safety checks and fire alarms could be improved for some people with mental or cognitive needs such as dementia. People requesting a home safety check are asked to contact NFRS where they are asked a number of questions. The occupational therapists suggested making it easier – now all customers need to do is to call the Service with the code from the booklet that they have been given. This has made it a lot easier for people to access the service.

Occupational therapy students have also been shadowing NFRS fire fighters on visits to see how the service might improve. Emma Darby from NFRS said:

“We're quite fire safety focused so they help us provide a more holistic service. They help us to pick up other issues. For example, people often offer us cup of tea and we usually say no because we're too busy. The occupational therapists told us to say yes – take that extra five minutes because it will

show you so much more than if someone sits in a chair and says that they are fine. Watch them do a task. This opened our eyes to problems people face day-to-day and changed the way we deliver our service.”

The occupational therapists have also trained fire fighters on how to talk to people with memory needs. The home safety checks were very verbal but this has been adapted so more visual prompts and stickers are now used. The stickers can be left in peoples’ homes by the fridge or microwave.

## Going a step further

NFRS has gone a step further and recruited a specialist Home Safety Check (HSC) Operative for Older Communities. NFRS has asked Local Authorities to share their data about individuals who can’t put their bins out because of physical or mental disability. These are usually older people or people with mobility problems.

The HSC Operative has received specialist training from the Police on burglary and from the East Midlands Ambulance Service on how to prevent people from falling and injuring themselves. During the visit, as well as looking for fire risks he also looks for trip hazards such as loose carpets and nails them down. The HSC operative is a joiner by trade so can do little jobs in the house too. Emma Darby says:

“It’s a very simple thing that can make a big difference to people’s lives.”

The statistics further illustrate the positive impact of this targeted initiative. 41% of Home Safety Checks (HSC) were delivered to people with a declared mobility impairment, long term health condition or disability during 2013-14. This is compared to roughly 20% of the population as a whole, and it all stems from a joined up, partnership approach to serving the local community.

## On-going work: meeting the needs of an ageing population

NFRS has a good working relationship with the Alzheimer’s Society and, as a result, has been doing a lot of work with carers. This includes involving employees from the NFRS attending Memory Cafes – an initiative that offers people with dementia and their carers the chance to socialise and share information.

Currently, two employees in NFRS are Dementia Friends Champions and 100% of their senior staff and 50% of crew members are trained Dementia Friends. The organisation’s goal is to make all employees a Dementia Friend by 2015. The 90 minute training session helps employees to recognise people with dementia. Speaking about this training initiative, Emma says it focuses on:

“Just being a bit kinder and spotting symptoms and knowing what to do. We’ve had incidents in the street after which we’ve gone back to report concerns to GPs. In some cases it just hasn’t been picked up before that someone has dementia so it has been really positive that we can help in this way.”

NFRS has recognised the challenges of having an older population. The national average is that 17% of the population is over 65. In Nottinghamshire, however, it is 19%, so they know they have an older population than the average. Emma says:

“We’re trying to put in preventative steps now or fires will grow in proportion to our communities of older people. If there is a fire, it can have a devastating effect on an older person who might have to go into residential care. We know that the majority of people want to remain living in their own home for as long as possible and it is our priority to make that home as safe an environment as possible.”

## **Older Person’s Day – 1 October**

NFRS is planning its campaign that will run from 1 October through to the end of December. They will be working with carers, local business and assistive technology providers to help raise awareness.

NFRS recognises that the Care Act places huge emphasis on older people staying in their own homes, but this can be challenging from a fire prevention perspective. However, new technology can help greatly. For example, smoke alarms that connect to microwaves so if a person inputs 300 minutes instead of 3 or places something metal into the microwave, it will sound the alarm. Emma said:

“We try to keep well-informed of technological advances. We can’t always afford to fund these measures alone but at least we can refer onto other agencies as well as providing family and carer’s information about what is available and how they can access them.”

**For more information on Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, visit:**

<http://www.notts-fire.gov.uk/index.asp>

**For more information on Alzheimer’s Society and creating a dementia friendly work-place, visit:** [http://alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=2979](http://alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=2979)

**For more information on Business Disability Forum, visit:**

<http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/>

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