CIH East Midlands Awards – Making a Difference

Category: Meeting the housing and support needs of an ageing population

Aragon Housing Association’s Telecare and support service

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<th>Background</th>
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<td>The drive behind the Telecare service managed by Aragon Housing Association is to enable people to remain living independently in their own homes for much longer. To this end Aragon has been a key partner in the Telecare service in Bedfordshire and now is the second largest provider of Telecare in the country, topped only by one London borough.</td>
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Since its launch in 2007 it has been expanded to offer an ever broader range of options for older people designed to help them remain independent for longer with peace of mind.

It has helped provide security many people across Bedfordshire and beyond and in a single day provides support on the phone and in person to over 1,400 people.

It is flexible and tailored to the needs of each individual applicant.

It has also provided an excellent example of partnership working being jointly funded by Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils.

For many users it’s currently a free service guaranteeing independence and freedom to remain living in their own homes at no additional cost.

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<th>How it operates</th>
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<td>Consultation with elderly customers has revealed that many older people would prefer to live in their own home for as long as possible – Telecare enables them to do this in a safe way.</td>
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The service is provided by Aragon in partnership with Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council Social Services, Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust, Tunstall Group and North Herts Careline.

Potential users don’t need to be a tenant of the housing association. Telecare is currently a free service to all residents of Bedfordshire, as long as they’re eligible. To receive this service, people have to be over 60 (those under 60 may be considered in exceptional circumstances) and have a need for the equipment.

For each potential customer Aragon arranges an initial assessment to agree what equipment is needed. This is part of a comprehensive care assessment to aid and assist independence for those who, otherwise, may not be able to continue living in their own homes. |
The main piece of Telecare equipment is a simple Lifeline alarm, a pendant worn either around the neck or the wrist which links to the Lifeline through an existing telephone landline and serves as the communication method between the customer and a dedicated control centre. This is usually activated by a button on the pendant, alarm, or by various fixed pull cords throughout the home.

But that is just the beginning. Catering for the very varied needs of the elderly and increasingly, the frail and the vulnerable, a wide range of other equipment can be supplied as part of the Telecare service.

As well as the alarm pendant Aragon offers other types of equipment which can be provided. These include:

- flood detectors
- smoke detectors
- carbon monoxide detectors
- temperature extremes sensors
- falls detectors
- bed occupancy sensors which can be linked automatically to switch on lights when people get out of bed.

All of these innovative pieces of equipment are designed to keep the customer safe in their own home and the use of these has made the service indispensable to many people. Equipment is provided according to individual needs and may comprise one or several items.

All the sensors and alarms are linked to Careline, a call centre which is operated from Hitchin, Herts, operating 24 hour a day, 365 days a year response. With each alert there is a friendly, specially trained operator who assesses the call and contacts the emergency services or the customer’s responder, depending on need.

The operator may be able to help themselves via the Lifeline intercom, or they will contact the most appropriate person to deal with the situation – this could be the emergency services, a relative or close neighbour, known as a responder. A responder is someone close to the customer (such as a next of kin, friend or neighbour), who can be contacted and visit the customer if necessary. Everyone who has Telecare installed has to have a responder.

How has it impacted on an ageing population?

The Telecare service has had a dramatic and positive impact on the elderly people living in rural Bedfordshire. In many cases it has delayed the move into residential care as well as providing support to people returning from hospital – in some cases leading to an earlier discharge date.
Telecare gives older and more vulnerable people the independence to go on living in their own homes even as their health may gives growing cause for concern.

Anecdotal evidence tells of the impact the service has had.

One customer, who was displaying signs of memory problems, often left her home in the middle of the night. Now, when she gets up at night, the sensor is activated and Careline are able to reassure her and discourage her from leaving. This has reduced the number of instances where her family had to intervene and feared having to move her into a home, from dozens to a handful.

Another customer was becoming increasingly frail and his family were concerned for his safety; by installing a lifeline, they were reassured he would be safe.

Other people who have been helped include:
- patients being discharged from hospital
- new referrals to primary/community services, including occupational therapy, district nurses and social workers
- older people with a diagnosed dementia
- those referred for rehabilitation
- people with a sensory or physical impairment
- those presently identified as vulnerable who would benefit from additional technology support.

**How can we demonstrate its success?**

The figures showing the popularity of the service demonstrate how successful it is and how the need for the peace of mind and greater independence allowed by the service is growing.

The Telecare service currently helps 1327 people in the area and is growing month on month.

In January and February 2011 a further 170 people were referred to the service thanks to its reputation.

In January there were 46 referrals which in February had grown to 67. Most people are aged over 65, but a growing number are under 65. Recent figures show nearly one fifth of new clients are under 65.

The success has been further demonstrated by the growing external interest in the Telecare model operated by Aragon and the menu of support services provided.
**Innovation and the way forward**

The Lifeline and Telecare service has proved to be so successful staff at Aragon are now being encouraged to promote elements of it to the wider community.

A marketing plan has been devised for the community alarm service consisting of a series of adverts in magazines which target the elderly and the vulnerable. New leaflets aimed at customers outside the housing associations’ original client base are being designed.

Staff are encouraged to play an active role in seeking new ways of promoting the Lifeline service within their appraisals objectives.

The marketing message is that for a very few pounds the Lifeline community alarm service can provide peace of mind and security.

Work has been undertaken to develop a range of support services aimed at a wider audience which is flexible and affordable to other elderly and vulnerable people in the community.

The Community Alarm Service provides a range of support tailored to meet your individual needs, including:

- **Package one** – A basic lifeline and pendant

- **Package two** – A basic lifeline and pendant, plus Telecare sensors and/or the option of one, three or five contacts from a visiting Home Support Officer.

It is hoped Aragon will be able to attract hundreds more Telecare users over the coming year.

**Supporting literature**

Telecare Service and Lifeline leaflets