

FREE & CONFIDENTIAL BENEFITS HEALTH CHECKS

Date 9th July 2007

More than 1,000 householders have requested a benefits health check from North Staffordshire Warm Zone Benefits team. Over £44,000 has already been successfully claimed and a further £250,000 is in the process of being claimed, that's all since the project began in January 2007.

Tracy Hine, Director of the Warm Zone, says "Many households have benefited from the skills and expertise of our benefit team. Yet, many families in North Staffordshire are still missing out on benefits owed to them, simply because they are unaware of their eligibility, including thousands of low income pensioners who sadly fail to collect their pension credit.

We offer a free and completely confidential benefits health check to private households who live in a warm zone and I would encourage everyone to take advantage of the benefits service.

It's impossible to easily summarise exactly who's eligible for payments. Yet it is easy to say who should check; cash may be available for anyone in one or more of the following groups.

- Those with dependent children and a family income less than £66,000.
 - Those without children in work earning less than £16,000.
 - Those who are out of work.
 - Anyone with an illness or disability.
- Carers, guardians, recent parents and those over sixty."

Latest statistics for the UK show that every year;

- £4.5 billion worth of benefits go unclaimed.
- 2 in 5 pensioners are not claiming pension credit to which they are entitled
- 1 in 3 people are not getting the council tax benefit that they are eligible for

Many people who work full time do not realise that they may be entitled to Working Tax Credits.

Gail Harris, Benefits Manager of the warm zone says "Many people simply do not realise what they may be entitled to. We have just helped one gentleman who was paying for his rent and council tax out of his incapacity benefit which is really intended to meet daily living needs such as food and fuel.

With our help he has subsequently been awarded housing benefit, council tax benefit as well as disability benefit to help him with living and mobility costs amounting to an additional £7,000 a year. He simply hadn't claimed since he became unable to work because he wasn't aware of the benefits, and had used the last of his savings and incapacity benefit to try to manage.

This entitlement was made possible as we were able to offer contact by phone and visit this gentleman at home to help him complete the necessary forms."

Everyone who claims their free benefits advice will also be eligible for insulation grants and other services. For more information visit www.warmzones.co.uk or call 01782 238443.

In the next coming weeks a letter will be sent to residents in Chesterton area telling them about the scheme. That Home Visitors, who will be in Warm Zone uniforms and carry identity cards will visit them and ask a series of questions on their doorstep after which the data collected will be assessed to determine whether or not they qualify for the free or discounted measures. A surveyor will then visit a few weeks later and all being well, arrange for the necessary work to be carried out