

## Warm Zone and PCT link-up aims for healthier finances - and better health

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**HUNDREDS of low-income families are set to reduce their poverty and improve their health and well-being, thanks to a unique partnership between North Staffs Warm Zone (NSWZ) and Stoke-on-Trent Primary Care Trust (PCT).**

Funding of £32,000 from the PCT is helping to finance a year-long scheme targeting vulnerable households in the South East of Stoke-on-Trent, covering Longton, Meir and Meir Park & Sandon.

The initiative will focus on bringing NSWZ's benefits advice and checks service direct to needy patients identified by their GP practices in the areas. Under the scheme, NSWZ are contracted to handle up to 700 cases over a 12-month period, beginning in April 2009.

Gail Harris, NSWZ's Benefits Service Manager, said: "The PCT is particularly concerned at the number of vulnerable families whose health and quality of life may be suffering because of their financial situation.

"For example, people finding it difficult to manage on a low income may struggle to budget for fresh, healthy food".

"The idea of this scheme, therefore, is to target specifically those identified as vulnerable patients and refer them directly through the GP surgeries in the South Eastern Cluster of the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

"We know from experience that many, many people are losing out on hundreds and thousands of pounds in benefits that they are actually entitled to, for a variety of reasons.

"So far, we have already generated more than £1.4 million in unclaimed benefits for householders across Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and we hope this initiative will build on that success, to cut

poverty levels and improve people's health and well-being as a direct result."

The Warm Zone's benefits advice service is completely FREE, confidential and independent, and offers:

- Full and comprehensive benefits screening to households, advice on what claims to make and how to increase income;
- Support and practical help for those who have not claimed before or have been unsuccessful with their claim;
- A home visiting service to suit the needs of the individual/family;
- Advice on other sources of grant funding and income.

"It may also be possible to organise appointments/outreach sessions for patients at surgeries, by appointment, too, although this is something we will have to look into with individual GP practices." Added Gail.

Customers within the warm zone areas of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent can access NSWZ's benefits service by calling 01782 238443 and asking to speak to a Benefits Service advisor.