

## Warm Zone urges needy families to benefit from expert advice

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**HUNDREDS of families across North Staffordshire are missing out on life-enhancing benefits that they don't realise they're entitled to, advice service experts said today.**

Many people wrongly assume they can't claim financial help, or that the 'system' depends on means-testing, according to North Staffs Warm Zone (NSWZ) officials.

Others are simply put off from applying by the daunting mass of paperwork that often accompanies making a claim. NSWZ's Benefits Advice Service has already helped to generate in excess of a staggering £1.8 million for residents across Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The team is now urgently seeking to dispel some of the myths surrounding the benefits system, in order to unlock more cash that would otherwise lie unclaimed in government coffers.

"Our research has led us to suspect that many customers aren't claiming what is due to them, for a number of reasons," said Gail Harris, NSWZ's Benefits Service Manager.

For some, they just don't realise they're entitled, and believe it's all about means-testing. This isn't the case, particularly with health-related and disability benefits, yet there is a reluctance to claim, often right up to the point where the customer is really poorly and needs a lot of care.

So many people struggle to manage when there is help available; others find it difficult to cope with the form-filling and often simply don't bother. Yet the assistance they could be obtaining, with our help, could make such a difference..."

Mrs Lowe and her family, from Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, are just one of the households enjoying a better quality of life following direct help from Warm Zone.

"I've always worked in the caring services, but had no idea what benefits I could claim for before Ann Mullard at Warm Zone stepped in," said Mrs Lowe.

I didn't even know that we were entitled to a blue badge, and there must be millions of other people out there also unsure of what they're entitled to.

We can now put the heating on without worrying as much, and with Ann's help we can still keep some of the savings we've worked hard for all our lives."



Mrs Cameron, of Newcastle, did not hesitate in recommending NSWZ's 'fantastic service' to others.

"In my previous job, I was always helping customers complete forms, but when it came to doing it for myself, I just couldn't do it," she said. "Ann's expert advice took away the stress of completing Disability Living Allowance forms at a time when I really needed advice and reassurance.

I was also feeling quite vulnerable and didn't feel like going out, so it was such a relief when Ann came to my home."

And for Mr and Mrs Madeley, of Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent, NSWZ's service has helped to put more money in their pockets each week – giving them a better overall quality of life.

“We used to say ‘we can’t have this, we can’t do that’, but now we can, thanks to the attendance allowance Warm Zone helped us to secure,” said Mr Madeley.



“We enjoy life more now with the comfort of the extra income – it’s helped so much. We’ve also noticed a huge difference in our heating bills. The free insulation we qualified for has improved our health; not only are we warmer, but we don’t have to worry as much about the bills either.”



Gail Harris added: “We would always urge customers to check things out – we’re here to answer their questions and it’s important for them to get the best possible independent advice and information as soon as things start to change.”

To find out more about NSWZ’s benefits advice service, visit [www.nswz.co.uk](http://www.nswz.co.uk) – where you can also complete an online self-assessment.

Alternatively, telephone NSWZ on 01782 238443 to arrange a free and confidential home visit/assessment by a Warm Zone representative or ask to speak to a Benefits Service assessor.