



Help Direct – helping you to live independently

Focus group report

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Executive summary

Help Direct is a support and information service for all adults aged 18 and over across Lancashire and is designed to help people get the right practical support, information and advice that they need before a small problem becomes a crisis.

During March 2012 the Communications Service ran a pilot marketing campaign for Help Direct aimed at older people and focus groups were used to help understand the target audience's impressions of the pilot campaign's images, if they clearly understand the overall message of the campaign, if they understand that Help Direct is a Lancashire County Council funded service and if the campaign would encourage members of the target audience to contact Help Direct.

Key findings

The main findings from the focus groups are:

Help Direct service

- Most participants in Accrington were aware of Help Direct. Their group 'Friends in Unison', which they regularly attend, had been visited by a Help Direct representative who described the service to them and provided them with some promotional material, such as fridge magnets. Despite this, participants knew no specific details about what Help Direct did or how it was funded.
- Only one out of the seven participants in St Annes was aware of Help Direct, although one further member had heard of the Safe Trader scheme. This was despite them recently receiving a Living in Lancashire questionnaire which asked questions about Help Direct. Again the group did not know what Help Direct did or how it was funded.
- After attending the groups and learning more about Help Direct the majority of participants said they would consider contacting Help Direct, and would suggest Help Direct to any friends that they feel could benefit from some help and advice.

Campaign testing

- Without prompting, two participants in the Accrington group could recall receiving postcards from the recent pilot.
- Although participants at both groups could clearly identify that the campaign is promoting services such as support with shopping, help around the home and in the garden, they felt some of the messages of the campaign were less clear. No one in the group saw themselves as represented by any of the images, despite a number of participants being in their eighties. Also, many

participants felt the word 'independently' in the strapline implies that the service is for people with acute needs who are housebound.

- Participants also felt that the campaign could be clearer in identifying that Help Direct signposts people to services and does not provide services such as gardening itself.
- Participants felt it would be useful to promote the financial help and advice that Help Direct provides as many older people currently have concerns about their finances.
- Participants felt that the campaign clearly identified Lancashire County Council's involvement, but they felt that the Help Direct logo should be more prominent.
- Respondents felt the text included on the campaign images would be easier for the target audience to read if it was increased in size, especially the telephone number.

Recommendations

- Produce an image for the campaign that shows an older person who looks younger and more active than those shown in the current set of images.
- Explore if it is possible to create another image that includes a financial theme, possibly using a couple.
- Look at clarifying the information on the back of the postcards to make it more explicit that Help Direct is a 'signposting' service and does not directly provide services such as gardening.
- Reconsider using the word 'independently' in the strapline as its connotations may suggest to older people that Help Direct is only targeting people who are being supported by social services to live in their homes, or people who live alone.
- Increasing the size of the text, particularly the telephone number, will make it easier for the target audience to read, as the target audience for this campaign is likely to have poorer vision than the general population¹.
- Make it clearer on the website that when people contact Help Direct, during office hours, they will speak directly with a person and will not have to go through a menu system first.
- Make it clearer on the Help Direct website, and on any promotional material, that 0303 is a local rate number from a standard landline.
- Explore the viability of using chemists across the county to deliver postcards to older people when they deliver someone their regular prescription.

¹ <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=6167&pageid=35900&e=e> (11/07/2012)

Introduction

Help Direct launched in November 2008 as a service commissioned by Lancashire County Council.

It is a support and information service for all adults aged 18 and over across Lancashire and is designed to help people get the right practical support, information and advice that they need before a small problem becomes a crisis. The service can be accessed by phone, email or face-to-face at drop-in centres. People can also find advisors at some local GP surgeries, libraries, and community centres.

During March 2012, the Communications Service ran a pilot marketing campaign for Help Direct, aimed at older people, and it wants to understand the target audience's overall impressions of the campaign images and messages, and also whether or not the campaign will encourage members of the target group to access Help Direct.

Research objectives

The objectives of the research project are to understand:

1. the target audience's impressions of the pilot campaign;
2. if they clearly understand the overall message of the campaign;
3. if participants understand that Help Direct is a Lancashire County Council funded service; and
4. if the campaign will encourage members of the target audience to contact Help Direct.

Methodology

To satisfy the objectives, two focus groups were held. Focus groups are effective in exploring perceptions, feelings and motivations, making them ideally suited to this project. In addition, focus groups, by their very nature, encourage discussion and debate among participants.

The focus groups were completed with members of the public aged over 55. Conducting two groups enabled the research team to validate findings, improving confidence in the research and recommendations.

Members of the public were recruited from two sources: the existing Living in Lancashire panel used by the Corporate Research and Intelligence Team, which is a representative cross-section of the Lancashire population; and people who attend the Friends in Unison group, which meets weekly and is based in Accrington. This

allowed a cross-section of opinion to be gathered and minimised recruitment time for the focus groups.

Seven participants attended each session. Up to eight people is an ideal number to manage and facilitate the group effectively and still gather a broad range of responses.

Participants were from the Accrington and St Annes areas, were all over the age of 55, all participants except for one were female, and all participants were white. Sessions were run in June 2012.

Each participant at the St Annes group was given a cheque for £20 to cover their time and transport costs. Previous focus groups run by the Corporate Research and Intelligence Team have offered £20 and have been successful, although up to £50 is more usual in the private sector. Participants at the Accrington group were not given an incentive as the focus group formed part of their regular 'Friends in Unison' meeting.

To minimise costs, the research team carried out the focus groups in a district council office and a free public building in the respondents' local areas.

Limitations

The nature of focus groups, and indeed qualitative research in general, means that only a small number of respondents from the population in Lancashire can participate. This means that the focus groups do not offer results that are statistically representative for all people in Lancashire; they only offer indicative or illustrative results. Results are therefore attributed to participants only and not the wider public.

The advantage, however, of focus groups is that they can explore issues and perceptions in detail, so a wealth of quality, descriptive information can be obtained, which was ideally suited to the needs of this research.

Main research findings

Help Direct

Awareness and use of Help Direct

To start the discussion, both groups were asked if they were aware of Help Direct and if they had used the service.

At the Accrington group most participants had heard of Help Direct, only a couple of participants had not. Although participants had heard of Help Direct, no participants could explain what the service does and how it is funded, despite the majority of the group attending a 'Friends in Unison' meeting where a local Help Direct representative explained what Help Direct did as well as handing out promotional material such as bags and fridge magnets.

In the St Annes group, awareness of Help Direct was lower than at the Accrington group: only one person had heard of it and one further participant had heard of the Safe Trader scheme. This is despite the fact that panel members had been asked a number of questions about Help Direct in a recent Living in Lancashire survey. Participants at the St Annes group were unaware that Help Direct was funded by Lancashire County Council.

No participants at either group had contacted Help Direct for advice, although three participants from the St Annes group had visited the website after being invited to the focus group.

Potential barriers to contacting Help Direct

As participants at both groups were not aware of the service that Help Direct provides, the facilitator outlined the service to them using information taken from the Help Direct website. This prompted respondents at both groups to ask some questions which Help Direct may wish to address in the information provided on its website.

The first question that was asked was if Help Direct was taking over from other organisations.

"This sounds like it is taking over from a lot of things that Age UK does."
– Accrington

"..isn't this service already provided by the Citizens' Advice Bureau?"
– St Annes

The second point that was made by participants was that if they aren't on benefits they would automatically assume that a service such as Help Direct isn't relevant to them.

"The first question these services ask is if you are on benefits. If you say no they say they are sorry but they can't help you." – Accrington

During the focus groups participants also discussed a number of other potential barriers that they believe might prevent people from contacting Help Direct for advice. They felt that people might be put off calling Help Direct because people of their generation are suspicious of having to go through an 'annoying' menu system, they would be concerned that the process would be longwinded if they want advice on a few topics, and one member also stated that they wouldn't be happy discussing their finances over the phone.

A final concern that participants felt may prevent older people from contacting Help Direct is that they feel they are from the generation where many people don't ask for help.

"[I] feel we are of the generation that just get on with it – I have needs myself but I just get on with it." – St Annes

Campaign testing

With the participants' level of knowledge about Help Direct established, the discussion was then moved to the recent pilot campaign.

The pilot

Participants at both groups were asked if they had recently seen any promotional material for Help Direct. Three participants recalled receiving a postcard: two from the Accrington group and one from the St Annes group.

Participants were then shown the images from the pilot campaign: the facilitators distributed all three versions of the postcards as well as some larger copies. When shown the postcards the participant in the St Annes group who said they had received a postcard revealed it wasn't a postcard from the pilot campaign. The two participants in Accrington confirmed that the postcards they had received were from the pilot campaign.

All participants were then asked if they could recall receiving a postcard now that they had seen the campaign images. They were also asked if they had seen the images in other places such as on buses or telephone boxes. No further members of the groups could recall seeing the campaign images.

Images

Next, participants were asked for feedback about the campaign images.

Diversity of target audience

Participants in both groups were very clear that they felt the images, specifically the people in them, did not represent them as older people.

"Only seems to be targeted at people who are infirm, or have mobility [issues]." – Accrington

"I'm recently retired. I wouldn't see these images and think of myself."
– Accrington

These views from participants reflect one of the problems of trying to represent such a large and diverse group with two or three images, but participants felt strongly that the people in the images only represented one type of older person, and that other types of older person should be represented in the campaign.

Despite being active individuals who are involved in local groups, participants supported their position by stating that although they look healthy on the outside and although they are active in many ways it doesn't mean they don't need help and support in other areas, and one participant (aged 82) said gardening is an area in which they are starting to need help.

"Older people are looking younger but it doesn't necessarily reflect what's underneath." – St Annes

Participants in the St Annes group also felt that the campaign was only aimed at people living alone, and that the campaign could be improved by using an image with a couple or even a group of people (representing a community).

In the Accrington group, one participant suggested targeting new pensioners with the campaign because, as a new pensioner herself, she felt she didn't know what services were available to her.

A further comment made by participants was that people who are frail and have mobility issues are likely to be in touch with services to support them already, so if Help Direct is about helping people with a small problem before it becomes a crisis, is the pilot campaign aimed at the right people?

Which types of help and advice should be promoted?

As both groups were keen to change the images to include older people who they felt would better represent them, participants were asked which of the images they would keep to represent less mobile older people. Both groups felt that the ironing image is the one that they would like to keep. Some participants in each group also felt that the shopping image could be used to represent slightly more mobile people.

"Go for the shopping one for mobile people and the ironing one for more housebound people." – Accrington

Although participants felt the images needed changing to include more representative older people, they had no issue with the campaign using an image that promotes services that provide help with gardening.

As the group were discussing changing the images, participants were asked if they felt that it was important that the campaign includes images of other areas of advice that Help Direct provides. In both groups, participants felt that, at the moment, many older people are worried about their financial situation and that if Help Direct provides advice in this area then we should consider developing an image with a financial theme.

"I'm looking to get a mortgage and can't get help from Age UK. Struggling to find mortgages for pensioners." - Accrington

It was also suggested that another campaign image could be developed around the themes of leisure, and health and fitness, although these had less support.

One participant suggested that the campaign could include more than one area of advice on each image.

"Maybe an image with several of the things they help with shown."
– St Annes

Does the campaign represent what Help Direct does?

Neither group felt that the campaign images and messages fully represent the service that Help Direct provides.

"I'd look at that [image] and think it's just for shopping. It doesn't make it clear what the service does." - Accrington

"You need to make it clearer it's a stepping stone that provides advice."
– St Annes

"It needs to say Help Direct gives you advice. Helping you to live independently doesn't really say what it does." – St Annes

A suggestion from a participant in the St Annes group was that the strapline could be "Helping advise you how to live independently", although this didn't receive much support from the rest of the group. Suggestions from the Accrington group included "There is help if you need it" and "Need help? Phone..." and "Help Direct – helping you to live independently", but again none of these suggestions gained significant support from other participants.

Participants at both groups also said that they felt that the campaign images don't make clear that the services Help Direct puts people in touch with won't necessarily be free, and if possible they felt this message needs to be included within the campaign.

Use of the word 'independently'

A number of participants in both groups cautioned against using the word independently because of its connotations.

In St Annes, participants felt that 'independently' implied living alone which may stop couples in need contacting the service. In Accrington, participants felt that, in conjunction with the images, the slogan further implies that the campaign is for people with acute needs.

"It implies someone who needs somebody going in to their home every day." – Accrington

"The word independently gives the impression that it's for people who are housebound" - Accrington

Logos and branding

The majority of participants felt that the pilot campaign makes it clear that Lancashire County Council is involved in Help Direct. They also felt that the Help Direct logo should be bigger or somehow made more prominent.

"It seems to be more about Lancashire County Council than Help Direct."
– Accrington

"There needs to be more balance between the Lancashire County Council logo and the Help Direct logo." – St Annes

Opinion was divided between the groups when discussing the value of including the Lancashire County Council logo on the campaign. Participants in the St Annes group were generally positive about the inclusion of the Lancashire County Council logo.

"I think the Lancashire County Council is an eye catching positive logo."
– St Annes

"Keep the Lancashire County Council logo. It's important because then you trust it." – St Annes

However, participants in the Accrington group tended to be more negative about including the Lancashire County Council logo, as they felt that it could confuse some older people.

"I would look at it and think it was for social services." – Accrington

"I think older people looking at that would ring Lancashire County Council."
- Accrington

Other comments from the St Annes group

The common issues discussed in both the Accrington group and the St Annes group have been outlined above. However, the participants at the St Annes group considered the images in much more detail and their comments are outlined below. Some participants, while expressing the concerns detailed above, liked the campaign images overall. However, other participants disagreed and described them as depressing.

"Pictures are very dour and depressing – make them more hopeful."
– St Annes

One participant stated they did not like the fact that the images are out of focus, but they were the only participant to express this view.

The group liked that the campaign included the telephone number for Help Direct, as it is very important for older people to be able to contact a service using the telephone. This said they felt that some people might be put off calling as they won't know what a 0303 number will cost them. They also felt the writing on the images should be larger, as it contains the key information.

"The words convey more than the pictures." – St Annes

"You need to avoid tiny writing - the telephone number needs to be much bigger." – St Annes

"You have to read a lot before you get to the words 'Help Direct'. Needs a very brief statement of what Help Direct does for you." – St Annes

A couple of participants also commented that they liked that the postcard included information on the back.

"The message on the back is better than the front." – St Annes

Communication channels

Postcards

That the two members of the Accrington group who had received the postcard from Help Direct could recall that it was promoting Help Direct suggests that, as a communication channel, it has the potential to be effective. However, when participants who had not received the postcard were asked about this communication channel they were generally negative.

"I wouldn't take any notice of it." – Accrington

"I wouldn't keep the postcard." – Accrington

"You are fighting against all the junk mail that comes through. I just collect mine up and recycle it." – St Annes

"If you catch someone with need it might catch their attention, but I doubt someone without a need will store it until they do." – St Annes

While most participants didn't think that the mail drop is a good idea, the participants at the St Annes group suggested working with chemists/pharmacies such as Boots, Cohen's Chemist, and Lloyds to include postcards with people's prescriptions. They felt this might work, as chemists drop off prescriptions at people's homes and they know their customers.

"Chemists collect your prescription from the doctors and actually deliver them, and most of them hand them over. So that's your link there. They actually know [that] Mrs So-and-so is taking a little longer to get to the door." – St Annes

"If doing the pharmacy thing get a Help Direct advisor to get out and talk to pharmacists to let them know properly about the service." – St Annes

The St Annes groups also felt that having something to take away from a GP's surgery might work.

"Most older people go to the doctors at some point." – St Annes

Posters

Participants felt that posters would be most effective in local GP's surgeries, libraries, charity shops and other local shops but they also recognised that these areas, especially GP waiting rooms, are overloaded with images and posters.

"Big posters better in surgeries etc but important to have something to take away as well." – St Annes

Radio

One participant at the St Annes group suggested that Help Direct should consider promoting itself on the radio, as many older people regularly listen to the radio. They felt that Help Direct should try and promote the service by having a feature or someone interviewed on Radio Lancashire. There was general agreement from the group that this would be effective and that using Radio Lancashire was a sensible suggestion.

Other ways to promote Help Direct

Individual participants suggested a number of places that a Help Direct representative could promote Help Direct. The suggestions were: stalls at events, town squares, markets and empty shop 'pop up' events.

One participant felt that local traders could help distribute postcards, but others in the group felt this would not be effective.

A participant in the Accrington group suggested continuing with fridge magnets as they had kept the one they were given.

Would participants consider using Help Direct?

In St Annes, the group was asked directly if they would consider using Help Direct in the future. The majority of the group was positive and said that they would use the service and also that they might consider telling other people about the service if they felt it could help them. One member of the group did say that they felt Help Direct was not for them.

Participants at the Accrington group were not asked directly if they would use Help Direct in future. However, three or four participants took some postcards with them to share with their friends at the 'Friends in Unison' group and twice during the group when participants mentioned issues they were having the group said they should try ringing Help Direct. A couple of members of the group did say that they would not

contact Help Direct, they would instead use services they were familiar with such as Age UK and HomeWise.

Key findings and recommendations

Key findings

The main findings from the focus groups are:

Help Direct service

- Most participants in Accrington were aware of Help Direct. Their group 'Friends in Unison', which they regularly attend, had been visited by a Help Direct representative who described the service to them and provided them with some promotional material, such as fridge magnets. Despite this, participants knew no specific details about what Help Direct did or how it was funded.
- Only one out of the seven participants in St Annes was aware of Help Direct, although one further member had heard of the Safe Trader scheme. This was despite them recently receiving a Living in Lancashire questionnaire which asked questions about Help Direct. Again the group did not know what Help Direct did or how it was funded.
- After attending the groups and learning more about Help Direct the majority of participants said they would consider contacting Help Direct, and would suggest Help Direct to any friends that they feel could benefit from some help and advice.

Campaign testing

- Without prompting, two participants in the Accrington group could recall receiving postcards from the recent pilot.
- Although participants at both groups could clearly identify that the campaign is promoting services such as support with shopping, help around the home and in the garden, they felt some of the messages of the campaign were less clear. No one in the group saw themselves as represented by any of the images, despite a number of participants being in their eighties. Also, many participants felt the word 'independently' in the strapline implies that the service is for people with acute needs who are housebound.
- Participants also felt that the campaign could be clearer in identifying that Help Direct signposts people to services and does not provide services such as gardening itself.
- Participants felt it would be useful to promote the financial help and advice that Help Direct provides as many older people currently have concerns about their finances.

- Participants felt that the campaign clearly identified Lancashire County Council's involvement, but they felt that the Help Direct logo should be more prominent.
- Respondents felt the text included on the campaign images would be easier for the target audience to read if it was increased in size, especially the telephone number.

Recommendations

- Produce an image for the campaign that shows an older person who looks younger and more active than those shown in the current set of images.
- Explore if it is possible to create another image that includes a financial theme, possibly using a couple.
- Look at clarifying the information on the back of the postcards to make it more explicit that Help Direct is a 'signposting' service and does not directly provide services such as gardening.
- Reconsider using the word 'independently' in the strapline as its connotations may suggest to older people that Help Direct is only targeting people who are being supported by social services to live in their homes, or people who live alone.
- Increasing the size of the text, particularly the telephone number, will make it easier for the target audience to read, as the target audience for this campaign is likely to have poorer vision than the general population².
- Make it clearer on the website that when people contact Help Direct, during office hours, they will speak directly with a person and will not have to go through a menu system first.
- Make it clearer on the Help Direct website, and on any promotional material, that 0303 is a local rate number from a standard landline.
- Explore the viability of using chemists across the county to deliver postcards to older people when they deliver someone their regular prescription.

² <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/?siteid=6167&pageid=35900&e=e> (11/07/2012)

Appendix 1 – campaign images

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

helping you to live independently

Need help with shopping?
call Help Direct **0303 333 1111**
to ask for practical support,
information and advice

help direct

www.lancashire.gov.uk/helpdirect

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