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Executive Summary

The Keep Warm, Keep Well scheme was created to tackle fuel poverty through targeted energy advice and practical interventions for vulnerable households, and is coordinated and part-funded via Staffordshire Community Energy.

This evaluation is based on the analysis of routinely collected data from 406 households, an in-depth survey from 108 participants, 24 participant interviews and 5 stakeholder interviews.

In summary, the scheme was considered an essential service offering practical, financial, and emotional support, especially in hardship. Financial aid through energy vouchers, direct supplier payments, energy debt assistance, and food vouchers was crucial for meeting basic needs like heating and food.

The service's simplicity, speed, and accessibility were particularly beneficial for those with mental health challenges or limited digital skills. Participants appreciated the respectful and compassionate support, which promoted dignity and reduced feelings of shame and isolation.

It took me from despair, to content (P29)

I do believe in my heart that Beat the Cold probably saved my life twice over the past year (P31)

Key recommendations

Recommendations include encouraging partner organisations to better support beneficiaries (e.g., clarity over fuel vouchers). Working with referrers to ensure they are checking eligibility and making participants aware of the intervention. Finally, expanding the data collected routinely to allow for more in-depth quantitative reporting.

1. Introduction



1.1 Context

This evaluation was undertaken by the University of Staffordshire's Centre for Health and Development (CHAD) as part of a scheme coordinated by Staffordshire Community Energy in partnership with Beat the Cold and University Hospitals North Midlands (UHNM) and supported by funding from Energy Redress Scheme. The aim of the evaluation is to explore the processes and outcomes of the Keep Warm, Keep Well (KWKW) scheme with a specific focus on the elements delivered by Beat the Cold.

1.2 Background

Energy poverty is a big issue in the UK, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations (Baker et al., 2019; Gillard et al., 2017; Groves et al., 2020; Martiskainen et al., 2017; Simcock et al., 2016).

The causes of energy poverty are multifaceted, stemming from a combination of low incomes, high energy costs, and poor energy efficiency of homes (Groves et al., 2020; Simcock et al., 2016; Bednar & Reames, 2020; Gillard et al., 2017; Lima et al., 2022). Vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, disabled, and low-income households, are particularly susceptible to energy poverty (Baker et al., 2019; Gillard et al., 2017). This can have severe consequences for physical and mental health, as living in a cold home can lead to various health problems (Simcock et al., 2016; Lima et al., 2022; Braubach & Ferrand, 2013).



A large proportion of referrals to Beat the Cold were from Stoke-on-Trent, which is one of the most deprived areas within the country, ranking 13th out of 317 local authorities in England (based on the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation), with over 54% of residents in the two most deprived deciles (Gov.UK, 2023a).

Stoke-on-Trent also had the highest rates of fuel poverty in England for the last two years running (Gov.uk, 2023b). Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire is an area with significant pockets of geographical deprivation (ONS, 2021).

The UK government has implemented policies and programmes to address energy poverty, such as energy efficiency obligations on energy suppliers (Rosenow et al., 2013; Jenkins & Martiskainen, 2018). However, these efforts have been criticised as insufficient, and more comprehensive and targeted approaches are needed (Bednar & Reames, 2020; Scarpellini et al., 2017). Community energy initiatives have also emerged as a potential solution to alleviate energy poverty, though their effectiveness requires further research (Bode, 2022; Martiskainen et al., 2017).

The KWKW scheme was established to address fuel poverty by offering targeted energy advice and practical interventions to vulnerable households and is being coordinated by a steering group including members from University Hospitals of North Midlands, Staffordshire Community Energy, and Beat the Cold. The programmes aim is to enhance the well-being and financial stability of these households by reducing energy costs and improving energy efficiency.



The KWKW initiative was launched in 2016 and brings together NHS University Hospitals of North Midlands (UHNM), Staffordshire Community Energy, and Beat the Cold in a collaborative effort to address fuel poverty and cold-related health issues. Through this partnership, vulnerable patients identified by healthcare professionals are referred to Beat the Cold for targeted support, helping to mitigate the harmful health impacts of living in cold homes. Beat the Cold then offer support to individuals through light-touch events, by telephone or home visits. Support from Beat the Cold goes beyond advice, and can include:

- Advice on applying for free or low-cost insulation;
- Advice on using heating systems to reduce cost and waste;
- Advice on finding the best fuel tariff and switching companies;
- Applying for Warm Home Discount and Priority Service Registers;
- Advice on fuel debt;

- Referral to agencies that specialise in checking benefits;
- Advice on renewables, such as solar panels, solar thermal, heat pumps and the ways to make them pay;
- Checking meter readings and bills;
- Negotiating with fuel companies over debts and payments;
- Referral to other schemes;
- Support with paperwork;
- Returning to check progress.

Some of these services are allocated a nominal monetary value to measure their impact and details are shown in the table below.

Service provided by Beat the Cold	Description of service	Nominal monetary value (per unit/referral)
Foodbank	Provision of a foodbank voucher	£58
Benefits check	Signpost for a benefits check	£4,500
Social Climate Fund Fuel bill grant	Referral to Social Climate Fund who can issue pre-payment meter voucher	£196
Water bill reduction	Referral to The Big Difference Scheme; a non-standard payment arrangement to help those who need assistance with their water charges	£306
Fuel voucher	Signpost to apply for fuel voucher – normally used if applicant has had their full allocation from Beat the Cold	£49
Problems with energy supplier	Support in dealing with problems encountered with energy supplier	Various amounts
Priority service register	Referral to the priority service register which provides support when there is an interruption to electricity, gas or water supply	£234

Continued....

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Service provided by Beat the Cold	Description of service	Nominal monetary value (per unit/referral)
Energy Company Obligation phase 4 (ECO4) referral	Referral to the ECO 4 scheme; a program designed to help low-income and vulnerable households improve their home energy efficiency, reduce heating costs, and lower carbon emissions	£9,541
Green doctor	Referral to Green Doctor; a partner who will provide and install small efficiency measures e.g. radiator covers, draft excluders etc.	£150
Safe and warm grant	Advice to apply for a Safe and Warm grant for Stoke residents only, who can offer boiler repairs or replacements	£2,500
Behaviour advice	Provision of behavioural advice; being efficient with boiling a kettle, turning off lights, heating only rooms being used etc.	£100
Smart Meter Technology	Advice given on using smart meters	£37.30
Disability Facility Grant	Signposting to apply for a disabled facility grant	£3,000

The KWKW scheme is part-funded by clean energy generated from solar panels installed on UHNM estate buildings. Surplus energy revenue contributes to a community fund, which Staffordshire Community Energy allocates to Beat the Cold for the delivery of tailored interventions. Significant additional funding for KWKW over the past two years has been provided by the Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme as part of an SCE project to expand the solar PV on UHNM buildings.

To ensure this reinvestment is effective and transparent, SCE operates under a clear governance framework. Any surplus income from the hospital PV installation is ringfenced in a dedicated community benefit fund, which cannot be used for any purpose other than addressing fuel poverty in Staffordshire. SCE reports annually on its income, expenditure, and the impact of its community programmes, including data on households supported, health outcomes, and environmental benefits.

This offers assurance that solar energy is not only delivering environmental and financial value but also creating tangible social impact for local people. The income is managed transparently, the surplus is protected for community use, and the reinvestment delivers measurable results.

Since its launch the KWKW programme has supported thousands of individuals across Staffordshire, demonstrating a sustainable and effective model for improving health outcomes and reducing energy poverty.

Beat the Cold follows the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance NG6 on excess winter deaths and cold-related ill health, which remains the gold standard for affordable warmth work. This approach closely aligns with their own vision and aims, demonstrating a strong commitment to tackling fuel poverty and improving health outcomes through evidence-based practice.

1.3 Aims and objectives



The aim of this evaluation was to measure the impact of the element of the KWKW scheme funded by the Energy Redress Scheme and develop a framework for Beat the Cold for assessing future monitoring. The aim was achieved through addressing objectives:

Assess the effectiveness of Beat the Cold's services within the KWKW scheme in reducing fuel poverty by quantifying the impact on various types of households:

- Evaluate the health and well-being outcomes resulting from the interventions.
- Evaluate the impact on health services by analysing the potential reduction in demand.

Explore and evaluate the experiences and impact of the Beat the Cold delivery on households

Evaluate the delivery process of the scheme, including stakeholder collaboration, communication, and project management including:

- Identifying challenges or barriers faced during implementation and how these were addressed.
- Reviewing the successes and case studies of the scheme.
- Exploring the suggested future improvements and benefits to the scheme.



2. Methods

2.1 Evaluation design and setting

The context for this evaluation was individuals involved in the KWKW scheme who were supported by Beat the Cold. This evaluation involved analysing non-identifiable data provided by Beat the Cold and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and individuals involved in the KWKW scheme. Ethical approval was obtained for this research by the University of Staffordshire Ethics Committee.

2.2 Participants

Potential participants were identified as users who have had some intervention from Beat the Cold as part of the KWKW scheme and stakeholders who were involved in delivering them.



2.3 Participant recruitment

Intervention participants

Beat the Cold contacted participants to complete a feedback questionnaire and provide them with the opportunity to express an interest in an interview to discuss their experience of the intervention they received and to leave contact details. A member of the CHAD evaluation team contacted these self-selecting participants providing a participant information sheet and consent form. A semi-structured one-to-one interview was conducted by telephone with consenting individuals and audio-recorded for transcription. Participants who took part in an interview received a £20 retail voucher in appreciation of their time.

Stakeholders

Beat the Cold provided a list of contacts of those who had been involved in delivering the interventions and sent an introductory email to explain the evaluation and that the CHAD team will be contacting them. Subsequently, the CHAD team provided potential participants with a participant information sheet and an interview by MS Teams was arranged for those who were willing to proceed.

2.4 Data collection

Routinely collected data

Non-identifiable routinely gathered data collected by Beat the Cold was shared with the CHAD team.

Beat the Cold also provided feedback questionnaires from participants (n = 108).

Intervention participants and stakeholder interviews

Interviews were conducted during June and July 2025 with participants (n = 24) by telephone where interviews lasted an average of 17 minutes (range 11 to 26 minutes) and stakeholders (n = 4) by MS Teams where interviews lasted an average of 38 minutes (range 22 to 52 minutes). Interview transcripts were anonymised. Interviews with six participants were written as case studies.

2.5 Data analysis

This was a mixed methods evaluation, using non-identifiable quantitative data collected by Beat the Cold, such as age, ethnicity, health condition, together with qualitative data collected from interviews.

Routinely gathered data

Quantitative data were processed to determine the impact of KWKW socio-demographic descriptive statistics of those receiving the intervention.

Data was tabulated for exploratory descriptive statistics and regression analysis identified the impact of various interventions on health and well-being.

Interview data

The research team conducted thematic analyses of the interview transcripts following Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) using NVivo R1. Extensive reading was conducted for familiarisation of data before data were coded and initial themes were generated. Themes were reviewed and developed to ensure they were data driven. The process allowed for the development of themes that reflected participant opinion. Data coding was conducted independently by two experienced qualitative researchers, who developed and agreed initial themes and relationships. These were then refined, defined, and verified by a third member of the evaluation team before being named and finalised.

Case studies

Case studies reported on the impact of the intervention on six individuals. Data was amalgamated from individual and stakeholder interviews, as well as the routinely gathered data.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative

Beat the Cold provided advice and where needed more intensive support to households across Staffordshire.



948

Total number of households supported during this phase of Keep Warm, Keep Well



542

Number of households supported through 'light touch' contacts at events



406

Number of households given more intensive support



A total of 406 households were referred for more in-depth support. The amount and type of support depended on the individual needs and circumstances of the households. For some households support was through phone calls, some it was a home visit and others a combination.



914

Total number of phone calls made across the 406 households



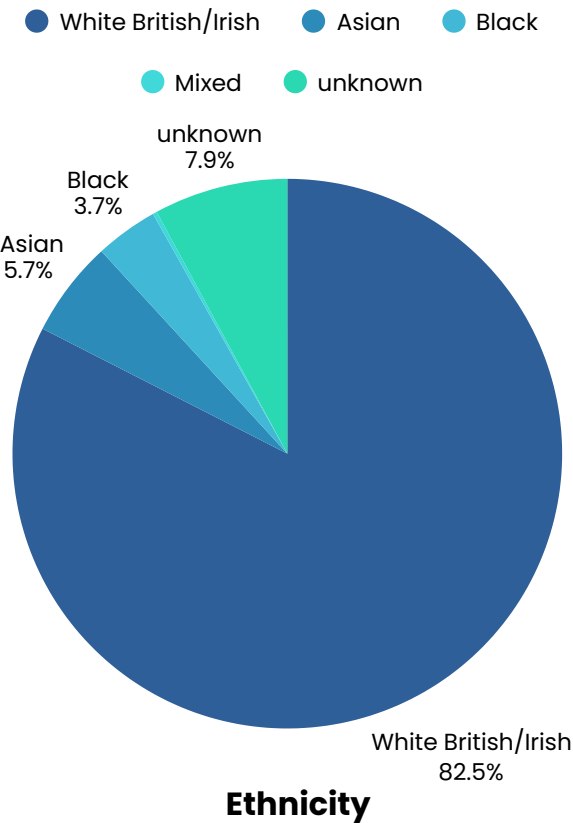
64

Total number of home visits made across the 406 households

The following information is based on the data collated from the 406 households receiving more intensive support.

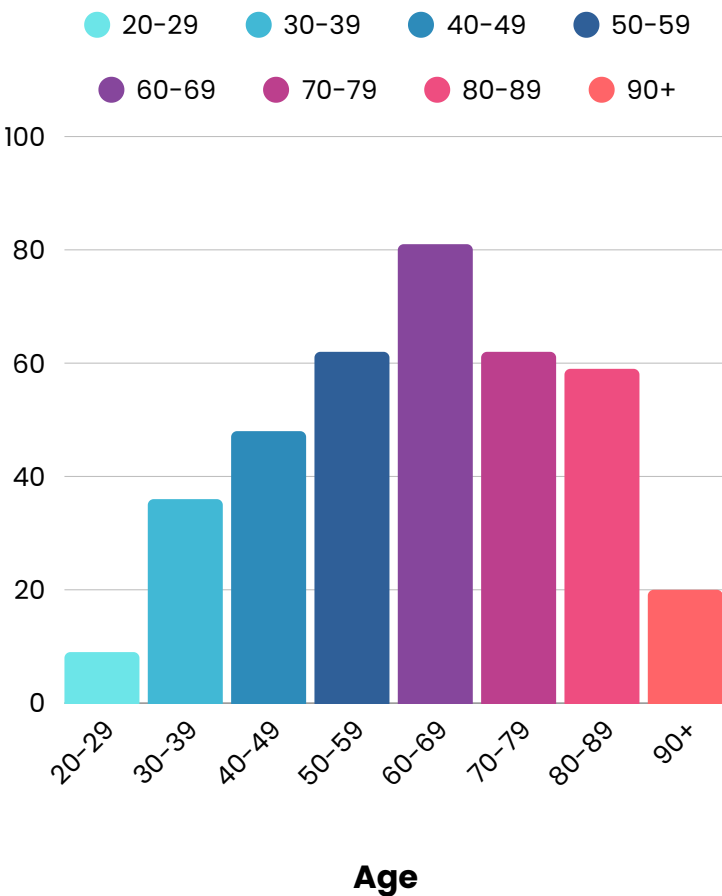
Slightly more females (55%) received support during the KWKW programme. This reflects that within the older age groups there are a larger number of females than males. Reports show that 50.9% were single with 9.8% being single parents. 20.9% were living as a couple with a further 5.6% with children. A total of 9.6% were of unknown status.

The majority of those who had contact with Beat the Cold were white British/Irish (82.5%). Overall, the primary concern of the beneficiaries were living with disabilities (49%) and poor health (39%). A total of 6.5% did not have any health concerns, with 5.5% unreported.

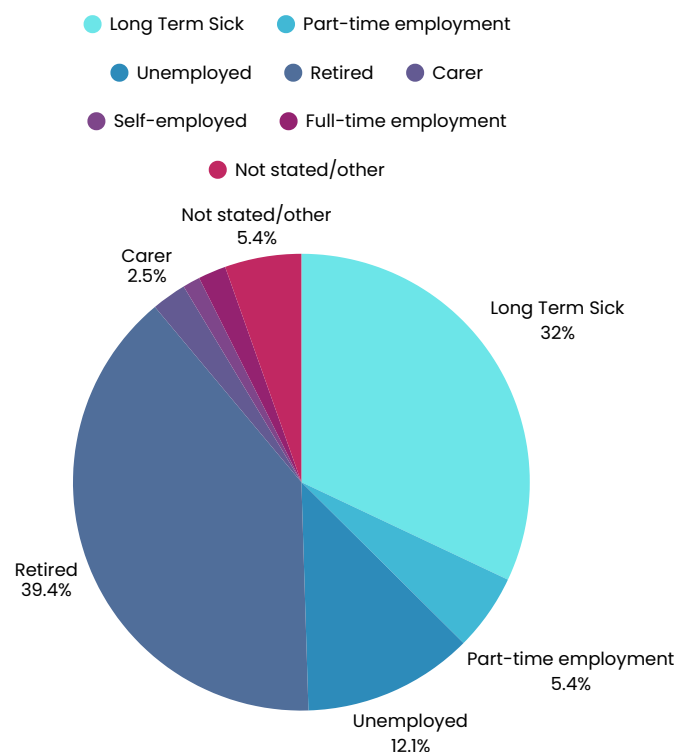


The general state benefits distribution within the whole Beat the Cold cohort verified the previously mentioned health concerns with only 5% of those with contact from Beat the Cold not receiving any benefit at all. A total of 41% were found to be registered for one benefit while the remaining 54% were eligible to receive two or more benefits.

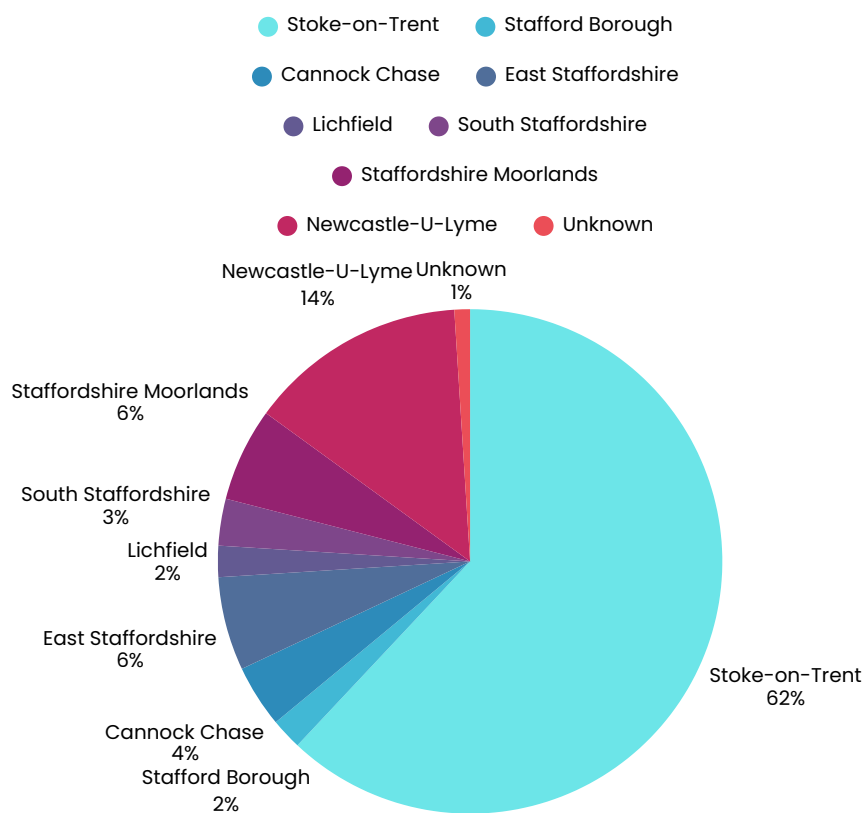
Over half the beneficiaries of KWKW were over 60 years old, with the mean age being 62.91 years (SD 17.44). The range of ages supported during this intervention was 21-102 years.



Employment and income status provide an extra dimension to the social vulnerability picture of the specific cohort, especially related to economic inactivity and their exposure to risks of fuel poverty, as only 2% among those contacted by Beat the Cold are considered full-time employees. An additional 6.6% of the cohort were employed in other forms, such as 1.2% self-employed and 5.4% working part-time. The highest percentage of 39.4% were retired, with 32% on long term sick and 12.1% were unemployed.



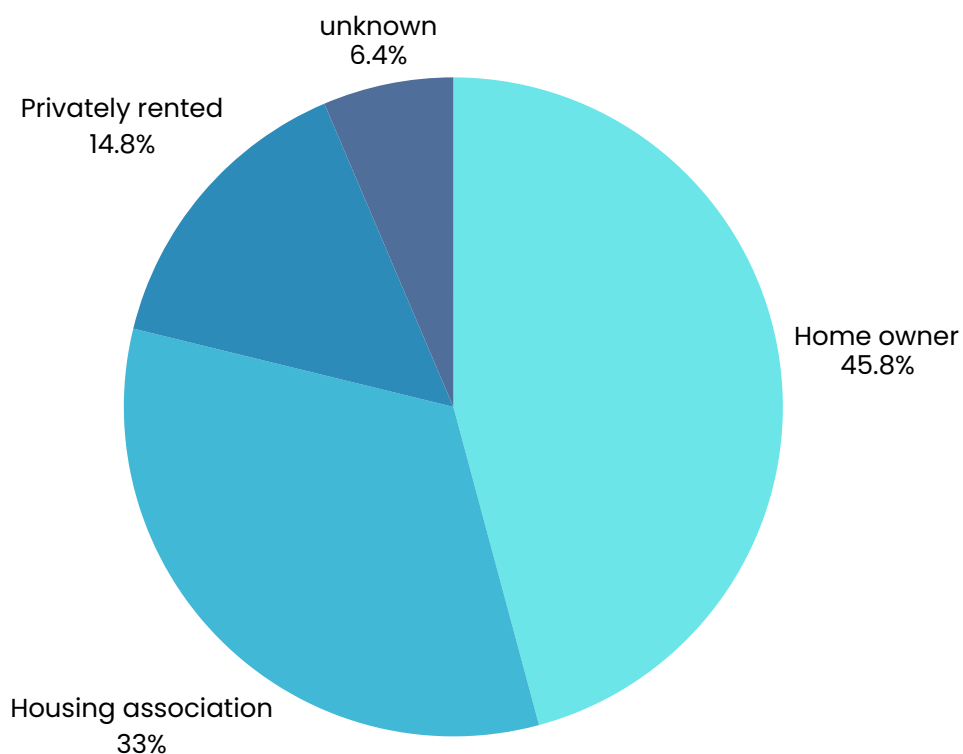
Employment status



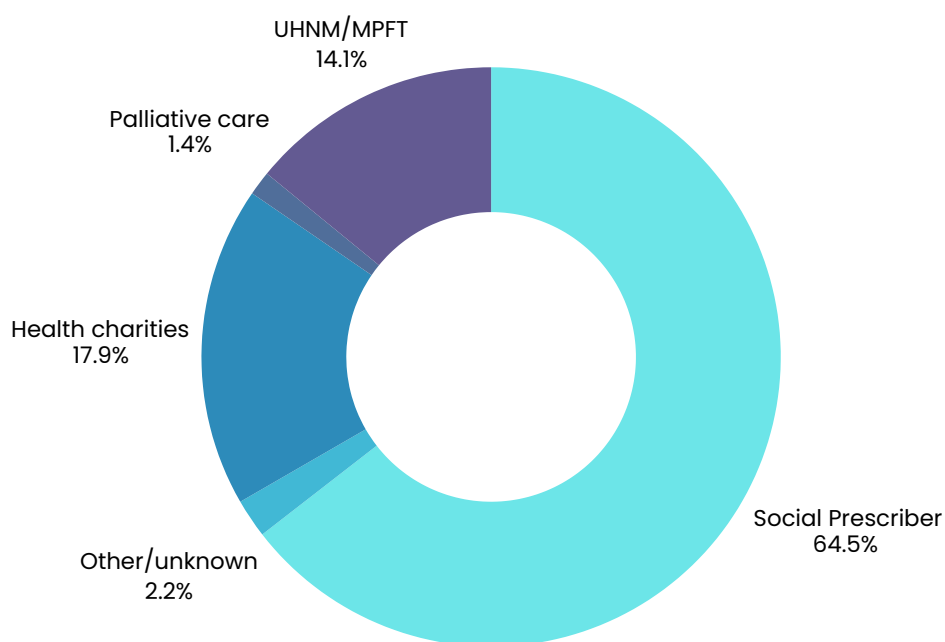
Residential location

The majority of referrals to Beat the cold, (from a subsample of 108 participants), were living in the Stoke-on-Trent Local Authority area (62%), followed by Newcastle-under-Lyme (14%). Referrals were also received from other areas of Staffordshire including Staffordshire Moorlands, East Staffordshire, Cannock Chase, Lichfield and Stafford Borough.

The highest percentage of those who had contact with Beat the Cold were renters, accounting for 47.8% (33% had a housing association tenancy, and 14.8% were private renters).

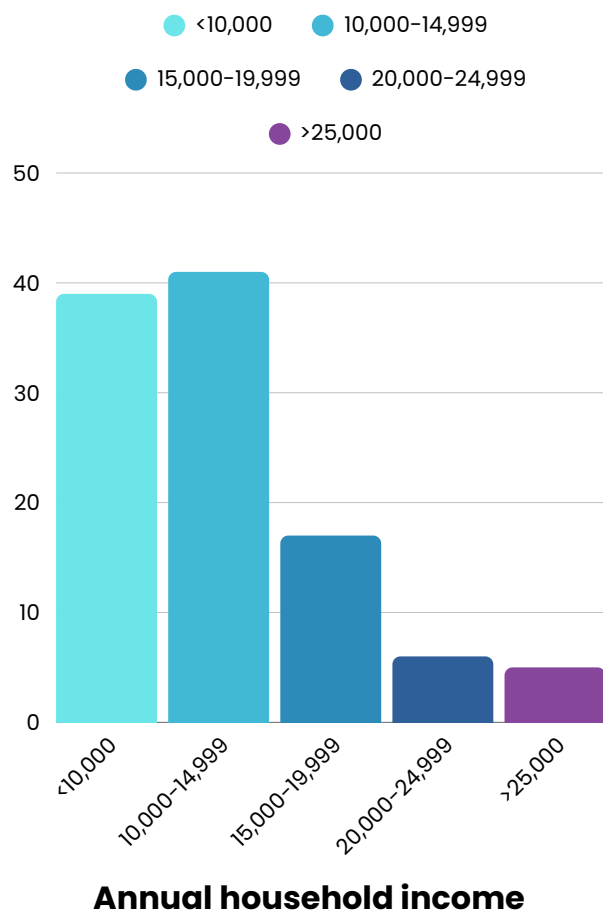


Housing status



Social prescribers were responsible for 64.5% of the referrals to Beat the Cold, with 20.3% referred through health charities and a further 14.1% being from UHNM/Midlands Foundation University Partnership Trust (MPFT).

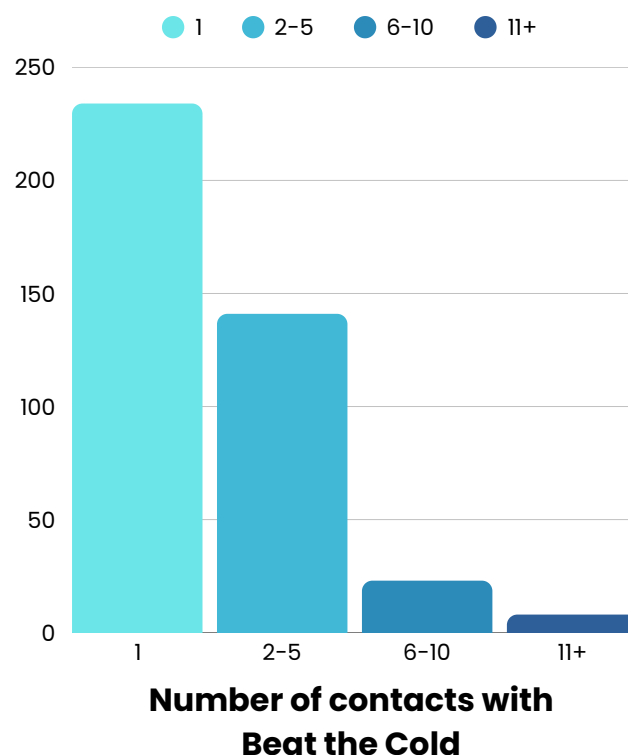
Referrals to Beat the Cold



The majority of people (234) only required one contact with Beat the Cold, with 172 requiring follow-up support.

74% of the subsample of 108 participants surveyed had an annual household income below £15,000. 61% of participants had at least one person in the household with a registered disability.

86% of the subsample of 108 had gas central heating. 59% paid by direct debit and 37% through a pre payment meter. The remaining 4% paid on receipt of their bill .



In total, Beat the Cold managed to provide 1,132 different support interventions that account for a nominal monetary value of £553,693.

Beat the Cold support intervention	Number of Beat the Cold beneficiaries	Total nominal monetary value
Foodbank	75	£4,350
Benefit check	32	£144,000
Social Climate Fund Fuel voucher	185	£36,260
Water bill reduction	124	£37,944
Signposted fuel reduction	48	£2,352
Advice on problem with supplier	270	£13,907
Priority service register	134	£31,356
Energy Company Obligation phase 4 (ECO4) referral	25	£238,525
Green Doctor referral	23	£3,450
Safe and Warm grant	6	£15,000
Behavioural change	204	£20,400
Smart Meter Technology advice	4	£149
Disabled Facility Grant referral	2	£6,000

The following results are based on a survey completed by 108 participants in a 50:50 split between genders, following their contact with Beat the Cold.



84% indicated they have received enough information from Beat the Cold on how to stay warm and well during the winter.



64% felt that Beat the cold had a positive impact on reducing energy costs.



86% responded that support from Beat the Cold has helped their ability to stay warm in winter.

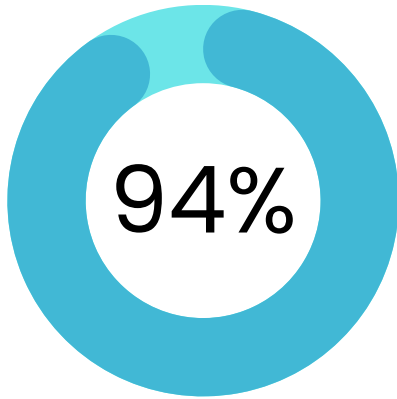


Participants who received financial support were **15 times** more likely to report that they stayed warm and well during the winter. However, the provision of information appeared to be even more effective: individuals who felt they had received sufficient information reported they were **43 times** more likely to improve their ability to stay warm.

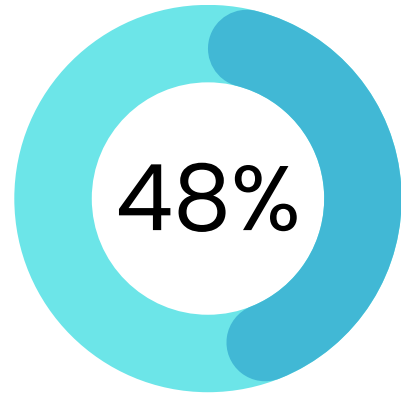


Through the self-report survey, this evaluation sought to assess the impact of BtC on healthcare service provision. However, challenges with the data meant that it was not possible to analyse the findings in relation to healthcare impact with confidence. This was primarily due to limitations associated with the use of survey-based data when examining pre and post healthcare service use, including potential response bias, low response to health service use questions, and difficulties when triangulating the self-reported healthcare service use information. See section 4.3 (page 54) for monitoring and evaluation recommendations to be able to examine this in the future.

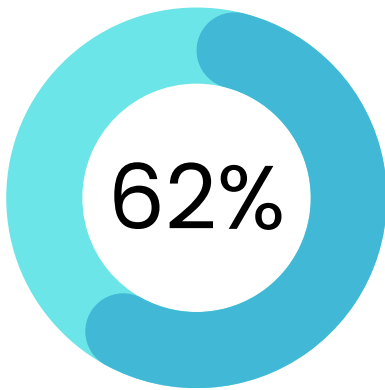
Following support from Beat the Cold:



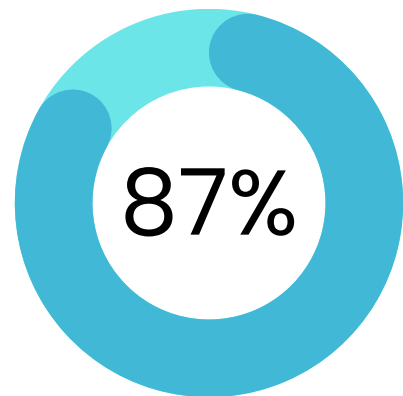
Said the advice they received was helpful.



Said their physical health had improved and a further 40% reported that their physical health had not deteriorated.



Said their wellbeing and life satisfaction had improved.



Said they would recommend Beat the Cold to family and friends.

3.2 Interviews

Six themes were identified

1.Reasons for support and referral routes

2.Energy efficiency through habit and support

3.Financial support

4.Benefits of support

5.Experience and accessibility of support

6.Shaping the future

Each theme, and any associated sub-themes, are discussed and supported by anonymised participant quotations identified by participant number e.g. P1, P2 etc. or stakeholder number, e.g. S1, S2 etc.



1.Reasons for support and referral routes

Participants accessed support from Beat the Cold for a range of reasons, often related to financial hardship or health-related vulnerabilities. Common challenges included unemployment or difficulty managing household budgets, as well as a range of physical and mental health conditions such as chronic kidney disease, fibromyalgia, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. Several participants were also living with disabilities, including visual impairment and scoliosis.

not everybody's an expert at looking at their bills and understanding them...[so] they ignore it and then the problem just gets worse (S42)

Referrals into the scheme came from a variety of sources, including GPs, social prescribers, practice nurses, Dougie Mac, North Staffordshire Carers, and the Alzheimer's Society, Staffordshire Council.

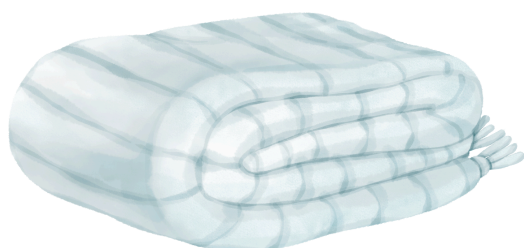
the referrals that we receive through from Health Partners are really great referrals for Beat the Cold because they've been triaged and identified as being in need and we know that those are the patients or residents that we can give the most support to in a way that's going to prevent exacerbation of their illnesses through cold (S45)

All but two participants reported that they had never previously accessed support from this type of service. One participant had previously used Beat the Cold, while another had engaged with a council-run scheme in the past but described the experience negatively, explaining that the financial support *“took forever and a day to come”* (P28).

Among those with no prior experience, some reflected on their unfamiliarity with available support, either due to a previous lack of need or limited awareness. One participant described themselves as *“a benefits delinquent”* (P31), while another explained, *“we weren’t aware of what help there was out there financially, because we haven’t had to claim anything before”* (P35).

2. Energy efficiency through habit and support

This theme discusses the practical support and advice which is offered to participants, with the sub-themes of ‘practical support and tailored advice’ and ‘existing knowledge and established behaviours’.



Practical support and tailored advice

Participants across several households commented that the practical support from Beat the Cold had a meaningful impact on their comfort and ability to manage energy use. Items such as electric blankets, oil-filled radiators, energy-saving light bulbs, radiator reflectors, draft excluders, and thermal throws had been provided through referral partners and were very much appreciated: *“We had help, like bringing electric blankets out, which is much appreciated. It’s a godsend”* (P28). One participant described noticeable improvements in their living conditions following installation of some of these items: *“Before, these doors were like rattling buildings...like a wind tunnel. They [Beat the Cold] got me draft excluders, now they are solid”* (P4).

These items were unaffordable for some participants and were described as vital to staying warm:

...things like blankets and stuff...they brought them to me...which was a help because I couldn’t afford ‘ought like that...it helped me out, because the price of everything with gas and electric is just horrendous. I mean, even now, I won’t have the gas on... because of the cost (P3)

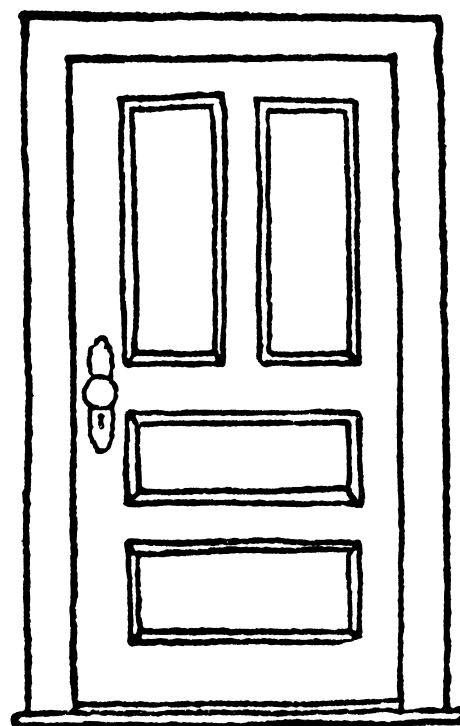
The practical advice provided by Beat the Cold often focused on simple, home-based solutions that participants had not previously considered. These recommendations were typically low-cost, easily actionable, and tailored to individual households. Some participants were advised to keep unused rooms unheated, use throws or blankets before turning on heating first, and to keep internal doors shut to retain warmth. One participant reflected on the impact of these changes:

It made a lot of difference...before I used my throws just for aesthetic. Now I think, well, I may as well use them... [and] those little things...like closing the bedroom door or kitchen door. I never consciously thought about that before (P10)

Participants explained they gained new knowledge from the practical advice Beat the Cold provided. One participant explained:

...when you are running a bath, run the tap slow because all the hot water comes out first...if you run the tap slower, it comes through hotter, because the water isn't rushing through the boiler at a lower temperature to keep up with the water pressure (P8)

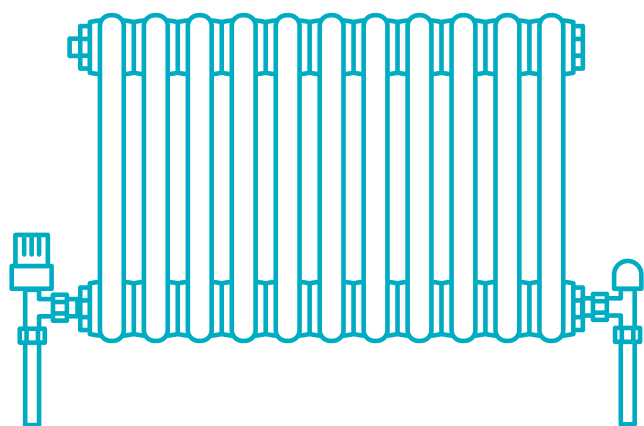
Other participants were advised *"don't turn your system off completely when you go to bed...so it's just ticking over because otherwise you're using more energy to re-warm your house again" (P10)* and to use radiator foils behind radiators to prevent heat from escaping into the wall, ensuring more heat is available to warm the air in the room. Beat the Cold encouraged participants to take a more strategic approach to cooking and heating: *"Batch cooking the food saved us some money, which was the idea they [Beat the Cold] come up with, and it's heating in the kitchen as well" (P31).*



There were also examples of more technical advice being given, such as understanding the function of thermostatic radiator valves or optimising boiler efficiency: *"They gave me advice on putting radiators at number one in each room...and about what temperature to keep the thermostat on"* (P2).

Existing knowledge and established behaviours

Some participants felt they were already engaging in energy-saving behaviours prior to any intervention from Beat the Cold. For some, this awareness was deeply rooted in generational values or from being cost-conscious: *"...all the things they recommended...I was doing anyway. I was quite switched on for that. I have always been careful and so I got all those things in place"* (P4).



One participant who had grown up during times of hardship and had developed resourceful habits early in life: *"what you do have, you see as very precious and protect it. I've never been a wastrel"* (P4). Several participants felt there was no further action they could take for energy saving, expressing a sense of having exhausted their options: *"everything that could have been done has already been done"* (P20). However, participants appreciated the reassurance from Beat the Cold that they were already doing the right things: *"it was just good to speak to someone and know that the things that we were doing, we couldn't be doing any more to keep the cost of our energy low"* (P12).

Theme summary

Beat the Cold's provision of practical items through referral partners had a tangible impact on participants' comfort and ability to manage energy use, especially for those unable to afford such items themselves. Alongside this, tailored practical advice helped participants adopt new, cost-saving behaviours, such as managing heating more efficiently and using rooms more strategically. While some participants already practiced energy-saving measures due to longstanding habits or financial necessity, Beat the Cold's support provided an element of reassurance.

3. Financial support

This theme reflects participants descriptions of a broad range of financial assistance provided by Beat the Cold and comprises of the sub-themes 'energy payments', 'advocacy with energy suppliers' and 'navigating complexities in providing support'.

Energy Payments

Participants reported receiving various forms of financial support, including energy vouchers and payments made directly to energy providers. These interventions eased financial stress, particularly for one participant who had *"lost the Winter Fuel Allowance" (P19)*. Others were supported with debt they had found themselves in, through supplier advocacy work to set up payment plans. One participant explained *"my biggest plus point really is I am out of debt on both my meters now, which is a big thing" (P8)* and another indicated that the financial support *"helped us to put a dent in the debit that we have got every month in gas and electric" (P12)*. Participants were appreciative of the financial support they received: *"That little bit of financial help, helps with everything" (P17)*. Another participant reflected on the significance of even short-term assistance: *"if it only covers a couple of months, but that couple of months is help...you're just grateful of what...you're actually given" (P28)*.

While participants expressed appreciation for the energy vouchers provided through Beat the Cold, by a third party supplier, several encountered practical difficulties when redeeming them, particularly at shops and petrol stations. The multi-step process involved scanning a combination of barcodes and printed receipts in a specific order and was described as confusing and sometimes led to failed transactions. One participant reflected, *"it's like you have got to scan three things to open the door to it...the guy at the petrol station didn't know what was going on, and I didn't either" (P7)*. This staff unfamiliarity of the process was reported to lead to delays or embarrassment: *"You end up like an idiot...there's a queue a mile long behind you while they are processing it and you feel like 'I want to get out of here!'" (P8)*.

Participants also highlighted accessibility concerns for older or digitally excluded users, as while the system was manageable for those familiar with smartphones, it would likely be challenging for someone without digital skills or support. Beat the Cold take care of this with a fully inclusive programme, screening for digital access and capability and if this is lacking will perform a home visit and visit the store to top up if necessary.



Advocacy with energy suppliers

In some cases, Beat the Cold also acted as an intermediary by helping participants navigate communication with energy companies, or the water board to access further support. One participant explained that Beat the Cold *“did a three-way phone call with British Gas for me”* (P31), with another explaining that Beat the Cold *“went through our energy bills with us to see if we was on the right tariff”* (P19). On one occasion it was reported by a participant that having reviewed their energy bills with Beat the Cold, it was deemed that no action was needed:

they did say our tariff was the best that we could have because we was locked in...so, they said to stay with it as we are until it is due for change towards the end of the year and then they will give us more advice on what they can help us with (P19)

One participant had experienced difficulties in communicating with the energy provider, which Beat the Cold was able to rectify:

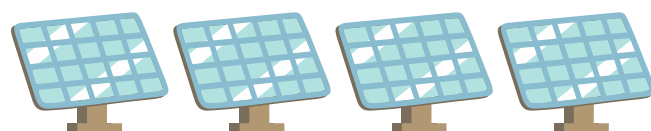
I had spent days trying to speak to Scottish Power and you know they just weren't taking any notice of me, it just wasn't going in what I was telling them. But when the [Beat the Cold] actually spoke to them, whether they understood more, or whether it was because they were ringing them, I am not sure, since they managed to get something sorted for me...we got about £40 off it nearly (P1)

Navigating complexities in providing support

Beat the cold offers a wealth of support and have been described as *“more like a social worker than a home energy advisor”* (S42), through the provision of a highly personalised holistic service that goes far beyond simple energy advice. This support includes signposting to a benefits check, help with water bills reduction, registering vulnerabilities to the priority services register, looking for grant funding for solar panels, insulation or new boilers, council tax reduction and signposting to disabled facilities grants.

Beat the Cold face several interconnected challenges in delivering effective fuel poverty support, shaped by the complexities of energy providers, shifting policies, and client engagement. One of the most pressing issues is the difficulty in offering accurate, personalised advice due to the wide variation across energy companies. Each provider has its own schemes and offers, making it hard to stay informed:

All the fuel companies are so different, some do something called peak save time...and there's little things like that that the different energy companies offer and you can't possibly know what all of them are (S42)



Fluctuating energy prices also complicate support efforts as do practical barriers such as reaching energy companies: *"It's a challenge contacting some of the fuel companies...you can't get through...you're just sitting there on the phone...it's a little bit infuriating at times"* (S42). In addition, although scarce, engaging with those in need of support isn't always straightforward. While many welcome support, others are hesitant or suspicious, especially in the current climate of scam awareness. One stakeholder explained that *"it's a bit frustrating when you know that we're just here to offer help and advice, and sometimes people just don't want it...sometimes just outright just don't want any help"* (S43).

Finally, Beat the Cold often face limitations with the resources available to them. Their ability to provide support is directly tied to what is available in the area and what partners can offer which can be a challenge particularly when each case is individually *"tailored specifically to their needs"* (S44).

A key challenge identified by one stakeholder was the low response rate when calling from an unknown number as many individuals did not answer or respond to voicemails. The initial more formal text message was revised to a more personable approach, mentioning they were a local charity and highlighting potential savings, two elements that appeared to build trust and interest.

We can only go as far as the external help that's available...because we don't have our own fuel voucher pot...we issue on behalf of other partners...we need a big bag full of different bits and pieces that they [energy advisors] can triage and support with (S45)

Theme summary

Participants reported that financial support from Beat the Cold, such as energy vouchers, direct payments to energy providers, and help with debt through payment plans, significantly eased their financial strain. While this assistance was deeply appreciated and sometimes transformative, the process of redeeming energy vouchers was often described as confusing and undignified, especially for those unfamiliar with digital systems.

In addition to financial aid, Beat the Cold also provided effective advocacy with energy suppliers, helping participants navigate complex billing issues. This combination of financial relief and practical assistance proved vital for many. Beat the Cold delivers holistic, personalised energy and financial support but faced challenges navigating complex energy systems, limited resources, and varying client engagement.

4. Benefits of support

This theme discusses the benefits participants mentioned as a result of the support they had received, with the sub-themes of 'essential basic needs', 'warmth supporting health and wellbeing', 'mental health impact', 'Support ready for the winter months' and 'changed attitudes'.

Essential basic needs

Several participants reflected on how essential the support they had received from Beat the Cold was to meeting basic needs. One participant explained: *"I got a couple of vouchers that I am actually using at the moment, if I didn't have them, I would be sitting in the dark right now" (P23)*, with another participant adding that *"it helped me, because I wouldn't have really had me electric or anything. It had been off, and I'd probably froze" (P3)*. One participant reported that the support enabled them to keep their homes warmer for longer:

I found that when I got the help with the Beat the Cold, I was able to put it [heating] on in the nights where we were a bit cooler instead of going and getting a blanket or going and getting a cardigan on...I did just put the thermostat up a little bit (P17)

Participants also highlighted the importance of food-related assistance provided through Beat the Cold. Several mentioned receiving food vouchers and one participant explained the difference it made to feeding their family: *"I've had no food shopping, and then I've had [food vouchers] to feed the children...it's nothing but amazing" (P29)*.



Warmth supporting health and wellbeing

Stakeholders repeatedly highlighted the core mission of Beat the Cold of addressing fuel poverty and its impact on poor health outcomes, especially for vulnerable residents: *"if you've got people with lung conditions...or even blood pressure you don't want [the home] to get too cold because that exacerbates both [conditions]" (S44)*.

if somebody came out of hospital to a cold, damp home we know that that can exacerbate their health conditions to the point where they'll be readmitted...so eventually you're having a...positive knock on with the health economy [reducing] inundation in the hospital setting (S45)

Participants often emphasised that the ability to keep warm was not only a matter of comfort, but had a significant impact on health, particularly for those living with chronic or age-related conditions. In several cases, Beat the Cold's support, whether through direct energy payments or practical advice contributed to easing physical symptoms and improving overall wellbeing. One participant with fibromyalgia described how the increased warmth in their home helped relieve pain:



Physically it helps as well because with the fibro...I'm so sensitive to hot and cold, when I'm cold, my bones and the muscles ache. So it was helping being able to have that little bit of extra warmth...it helped with my physical pain barrier...it sort of has had a ripple effect. It helps with other things, not just the financial thing (P17)

For others, warmth was critical for vulnerable family members with dementia-related conditions: *"It has helped because with my wife having vascular dementia...she's feeling the cold a lot, and we're having the fires on and everything a lot more" (P2).*

Mental health impact

Participants reported that Beat the Cold's support had a substantial positive effect on their mental health. Many described feeling less anxious and stressed because of receiving financial assistance with energy costs, which helped ease the burden of bills and everyday expenses. For example, one participant said, *"It gave me a little bit of peace of mind...a little bit more of the stress free to help me with my recovery" (P10)*, while another shared, *"It took me from despair, to content" (P29)*. The ability to keep their homes warm, feed their families, and feel supported alleviated emotional strain and improved overall wellbeing:

it's picked me up, obviously, because I can eat as well...and obviously with the help with the heating, you know, the tokens they give me for the electric and things, it really helped me...without it you would suffer (P3)

Several participants described how Beat the Cold's involvement directly reduced their mental health struggles, particularly when they had no other support: *"I struggle with my mental health anyway, but sitting in the dark, with all your food going off in the freezer just makes it ten times worse" (P23)*. Another participant shared their feelings:

this is going to sound way over the top for you, but I do believe in my heart that beat the cold probably saved my life twice over the past year...they just took all that load from me and said leave it with me (P31)

Others mentioned the value of simply having someone to talk to and help navigate complex systems: *"They kind of saved my sanity...it's the mental aspect as well of knowing somebody is there" (P37)*. The combination of practical help and human connection played a vital role in improving mental health outcomes. One participant with ADHD who suffers with mental ill health and other physical problems, found communicating with energy companies to be a challenging process:

so for me back and forth on the phone to Scottish Power was an absolutely nightmare, so they kind of saved my sanity, because they did it all for me...it has helped me mentally as well, because if I would have had to go through this all by myself, I don't know what I would have done (P37)



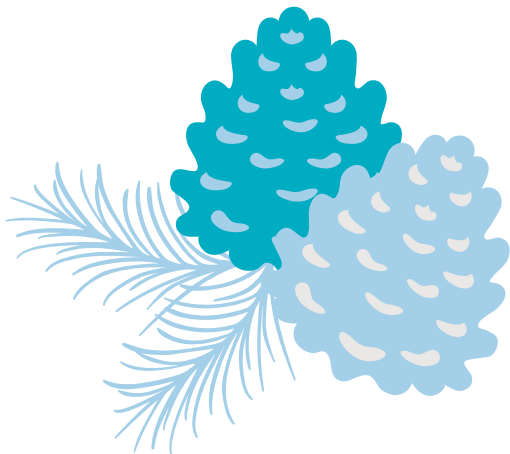
Another participant explained how the support had helped with their physical and mental pain:

It's more mental wellbeing, because the pain is still there...but the comfort of getting out of bed, when it is warm, to have warm tea, to have a warm meal that psychologically is helping you out. Going through the pain which you are having every day, that you don't have to wake up in a cold home, then you are worrying if you have got enough electric to get a meal done, to take a bath, etc. that took off really a lot of worries of my head (P34)

Support ready for the winter months

While many participants had already experienced the positive effects of Beat the Cold's support, those receiving support more recently noted that the full benefits, particularly related to heating, were expected to become more evident during the upcoming colder months. As one participant explained, *"It will allow us to hopefully leave the heating on a little bit more, that we would have done if we hadn't of got it" (P19)*. Others highlighted the mental relief of knowing future costs would be more manageable, reducing anxiety about winter energy bills: *"It has really made the Gas and Electric Account look so much better, that we are not worrying about winter coming, and the cold" (P19)*. Another participant explained:

mentally, it did help a little bit because I do worry about bills and... over the winter months I have got that little bit extra that I haven't got to keep finding and when summer comes, I'm not going to be in debt because I've used me heating a little bit more (P17)



Changed attitudes

Several participants reported significant shifts in their attitudes towards seeking help and managing their financial situations because of their involvement with Beat the Cold. One participant expressed that the support encouraged them to actively ask for assistance rather than *"not asking for help and just digging yourself in a hole all the time and not doing anything and struggling" (P3)*.

Additionally, some participants reflected on how their pride initially prevented them from accessing help, but that Beat the Cold had altered their perspective on this stigma. One participant emphasised that asking for support is not a sign of inadequacy, but a realistic response to changing life circumstances, such as aging or inability to work:

I do see that as things get really bad, there are things in the system that I can go to. Where I have never gone to the system for anything, but now I think my pride stops me talking to anyone because obviously I don't want to seem like an inadequate person...I am not inadequate; I am old and can no longer go to work to support. So, it did change my attitude somewhat (P4)

This shift highlights the intervention not only provided practical aid but also helped participants foster a more open and proactive approach to seeking support.

5. Experience and accessibility of support

This theme considers feedback from participants about the service they received from Beat the Cold and includes the sub-themes 'invaluable service' and 'compassionate and non-judgemental'.

Invaluable service

Participants consistently described the support provided by Beat the Cold as invaluable, with many emphasising how essential and impactful it was for them personally, and how they could imagine it being equally vital for others: *"it was invaluable to me and you know I can only imagine them being invaluable to other people"* (P1). The information and advice given were frequently praised for being clear, straightforward, and easily understandable, eliminating the need for additional services or complicated steps. One participant explained: *"in terms of the advice that I was given and what I was sent it was very easy to understand"* (P10). Participants appreciated the responsiveness of the service, praising the quick turnaround times and the convenience of contact options, whether by phone or home visits, ensuring support was timely and accessible.

The service from Beat the Cold is described as empathetic, tailored, and human-centered, often going beyond energy advice into broader emotional and social care. Home visits enable Beat the Cold staff to *"see for yourself what the house is like, what the temperatures like...if they have any draughts, damp, mould, anything like that"* (S43) making it *"so important to have the whole holistic approach... seeing how people manage and live... at home"* (S42).



The simplicity of the process was repeatedly acknowledged as a crucial factor, especially given the existing stresses faced by participants. Comments such as *"it was brilliant, it was dead easy, which is what we need, we have got enough stress going on without anything else being difficult"* (P12) underscored the importance of making the support accessible and low-burden.

For individuals with mental health challenges or concentration difficulties, the ease of the service was particularly significant. One participant shared how much they appreciated that much of the effort was made on their behalf, reducing their own burden:

I found it quite easy because I normally struggle obviously because of all my my mental health things I struggle with concentrating and remembering...the people [from Beat the Cold] that I spoke to and the help that I've got...made it easier for me. I didn't have to do too much myself. It was a lot was done for me, which helped me a lot (P17)

Participants also valued the proactive nature of the support, with staff going *"above and beyond...they offered me the help when I didn't know I was entitled to it"* (P17). The programmes' flexibility was evident in its offer to provide in-person assistance, including visits from staff to help switch energy suppliers, a service especially beneficial for those less confident with technology: *they could come out...with a laptop and...help us to switch...because not everybody finds it easy. So that that's a good thing that they do, have these people who can come out and help you (P2).*

Rather than simply solving problems, the approach from Beat the Cold includes educating and empowering participants to manage their energy usage and bills:

I try and give them a little bit of homework to try and sort it out themselves, so empowering them a little bit as well...I wouldn't want to sort of go in and just take over, sort it all out and not explain it and then just leave them with it because it'll all just come up again (S42)



Compassionate and non-judgemental

A powerful and recurring aspect across participant accounts was the deep appreciation for the respectful, empathetic, and human-centered approach of Beat the Cold staff. Several participants highlighted that the staff were genuinely kind, non-judgemental, and compassionate, making them feel comfortable even in vulnerable situations.

One participant described the interaction as *“you just felt as though you had got a friend in your home, rather than a stranger” (P1)*, reflecting the warmth and reassurance staff brought during home visits.

Non-judgement and dignity were especially important to participants who had never asked for help before and were struggling with pride or embarrassment. One participant commented that the Beat the Cold team *“don’t make you feel like you’re begging, and you are appreciative of how they speak to you...they speak to you and not down to you” (P28)*. For many, this supportive attitude helped overcome the emotional barriers of asking for support. One participant remarked, *“I felt like a freeloader...but they didn’t make me feel like that” (P39)*, showing how sensitive and supportive interactions helped mitigate feelings of shame or inadequacy.

the best thing about it was, there was no judgement...sometimes you feel embarrassed about ringing these lines and feel a little bit vulnerable about it and out of the comfort zone and he was very professional, but at the same time, very friendly...[and] understanding and actually genuinely helpful, that’s the best thing really (P35)

The professionalism and genuine compassion shown by Beat the Cold staff also stood out. One participant commented that *“the lady who I had was very compassionate. She’s very understanding about me mental health...she made me feel comfortable, she didn’t make me feel like a little scrounger, she was very reassuring” (P39)*. Another participant emphasised the emotional relief of simply being heard, adding that the *“biggest benefit of all was someone was listening to me” (P4)* and the emotional challenge of moving from financial independence to needing help was acknowledged:

I feel like a freeloader because I’ve never had to have help in...[my] life, I’ve always had my own money and stuff. I’ve always worked. So when you go from working to not working and having no money and then getting help, it’s a bit down grading. But they didn’t make me feel like that (P39)

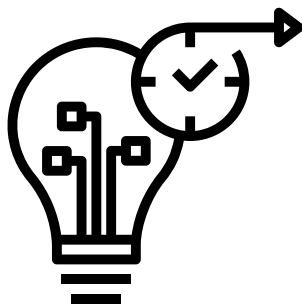
Overall, the interpersonal qualities of Beat the Cold staff, compassion, kindness, patience, and respectful communication, played a central role in shaping positive experiences and improving participants’ emotional wellbeing. These interactions often meant as much, if not more, than the financial or practical support itself.

Theme summary

Participants described Beat the Cold's support as essential, highlighting its clarity, simplicity, and accessibility, especially valuable for those facing stress, mental health challenges, or limited digital skills. The service was praised for being proactive, responsive, and flexible, with staff often going beyond expectations to assist. A particularly valued aspect was the compassionate, respectful, and non-judgemental approach of staff, which made participants feel heard, dignified, and emotionally supported, even when asking for help was difficult. This human-centered interaction often had as much impact as the practical support provided.

6. Shaping the future

This theme explains the sustainability of Beat the Cold from the participants perspective and includes the sub-themes of 'referrals onto others', 'limited public awareness', 'continuation of support' and 'suggestions for improvement'.



Referrals on to others

All participants expressed that they would recommend Beat the Cold to others in need of support. Many had already referred others to the service, motivated by the tangible improvements they had experienced, such as *"the benefits of being warmer and not having to worry quite so much about bills"* (P19). Additionally, the impact of the support provided by Beat the Cold extended beyond individual households. One participant described how they had shared the advice they received with their daughter, helping to pass on knowledge and promote energy-saving behaviours within their wider family network:

my daughter always leaves her kitchen window open...and I'm always like, well, why don't you just shut the living room door that goes into the kitchen...it's a big space, but it's cooling down really quickly. But when you come to warm it up, it takes a lot more energy. So that's what she does now as well (P10)

Limited public awareness

While participants consistently valued the support they received, many indicated they had not known such services existed prior to referral. Participants reported that public awareness and understanding of the services offered by Beat the Cold would be increased. As already demonstrated, the support received came only after a referral from a third party, such as a local hospice, GP, or social prescriber. Some participants stated outright that they had previously “*never heard of it [Beat the Cold]*” (P2) and had “*just struggled along*” (P20) before discovering help was available. These reflections suggest an information gap particularly for individuals who have not previously engaged with formal support systems.

However, the reason the project is not publicly advertised is because it operates solely on professional referrals. One potential challenge was keeping up the momentum of professional referrals, however this was overcome by building relationships with health professionals. One of the biggest achievements for Beat the Cold has been the relationships that have been built with health professionals:

this particular project is reliant on those professional referrals...something that's been really important to us, particularly in the last 12 months has been to ensure that we stay in the hearts and minds of the professional referral network (S45)

These relationships were often achieved by Beat the Cold staff playing an active role in promoting the service through direct engagement with health professionals and the public, via regular hospital ward visits and having a presence through invitations to community events.

Continuation of support

Even after initial contact, many participants expressed confusion about how to continue receiving support. A commonly cited example was the misunderstanding around the need to reapply annually for financial assistance. Several individuals believed once they had completed an initial application, support would be ongoing or automatically renewed. As a result, some missed out on help in subsequent years without realising they needed to take further action: “*I didn't know you had to apply for it every year. So last year I didn't apply for it because...I thought in the end it was just repeated, but obviously not, you got to reapply for it*” (P28). In contrast, several participants mentioned receiving multiple rounds of support throughout the year without the need to reapply: “*They kept sending us vouchers for gas and electric, I think about three times*” (P31). One participant explained “*I didn't have to apply second time, or call them, it [financial support] happened automatically*” (P34).

In explanation of this variation, financial energy support varies depending on geographical location which explains the difference in experience between automatic renewal of financial support, or reapplication, which is set by the funders.

Participants made a number of practical and consistent recommendations to improve outreach and engagement:

- **Leafleting and posters:** Many participants advocated for more visible advertising through flyers and posters, particularly in GP surgeries, pharmacies, and community centres. Several noted that they routinely look at noticeboards while waiting for appointments, but had never seen any mention of Beat the Cold.
- **Social media and online presence:** Participants with some digital literacy suggested greater use of social media platforms like Facebook as a complement to, not replacement of, physical materials.
- **Follow-up contact and reminders:** Participants suggested that reminder letters, emails, questionnaire or even short phone calls could go a long way in improving continued support and monitoring of needs. A simple text or email about reapplying for further financial support each year was suggested by participants.

- **Clearer communication:** Participants suggested that initial conversations could include details of how long the support lasts, what follow-up (if any) to expect, and whether reapplication is necessary. There were multiple suggestions from participants that services could provide printed packs or leaflets outlining the full range of support available. These might include tips for keeping warm, crisis contact numbers, and guidance on energy tariffs, as well as details about how to reapply for future support.

Theme summary

Participants viewed Beat the Cold as a highly valuable service they were eager to recommend to others, often referring friends or sharing advice within their families. However, most were initially unaware the service existed, having only accessed it through third-party referrals, highlighting a significant gap in public awareness. One of the biggest achievements for Beat the Cold has been the development of trusted professional connections to ensure the continuation of referrals.

There was confusion around the need to reapply for financial support annually, with inconsistent experiences reported. To improve sustainability and reach, participants suggested clearer communication, follow-up reminders, printed information packs, and increased visibility through posters, leaflets, and social media.

Overall summary

Participants described Beat the Cold as an essential and life-enhancing service that provided practical, financial, and emotional support, particularly during times of hardship. The financial help, such as energy vouchers, direct payments to suppliers, and energy debt management, was widely appreciated and often crucial in helping participants meet basic needs like heating and food. For many, this support brought immediate relief and reduced anxiety, while also contributing to longer-term wellbeing by improving warmth and both physical and mental health.

The service was praised for its simplicity, speed, and accessibility, particularly benefiting individuals with mental health challenges or limited digital skills. Participants valued the proactive, flexible approach of staff who often helped beyond expectations, including assistance with switching tariffs or contacting energy suppliers directly. Just as important was the respectful and compassionate way support was delivered. Many participants, especially those unused to asking for help, spoke of being treated with dignity and without judgement, which helped reduce feelings of shame and isolation.

Beyond individual impact, participants shared advice and referrals with friends and family, suggesting a ripple effect of the benefits. However, awareness of Beat the Cold remained limited, with most people learning about it only through third-party referrals, however Beat the Cold has continued to develop trusted professional connections to ensure the continuation of referrals. There was also confusion around the continuation of financial support, with inconsistent experiences of whether reapplication was necessary; these inconsistencies were as a result of external constraints of the energy support sector. Participants suggested improvements such as clearer communication, reminder systems, printed information packs, and increased visibility through leaflets and social media. Overall, Beat the Cold was seen not only as a source of essential support, but also as a service that restored dignity, confidence, and emotional wellbeing.

There were several challenges in delivering effective support through Beat the Cold, including difficulties keeping up with varying energy company schemes, making it hard to offer accurate advice, and being limited to only offering support that external partners make available. Reaching energy providers is often time-consuming and frustrating, further complicating their work. Additionally, some clients were resistant to help or mistrustful, making engagement and support delivery more difficult.

There is support out there, but if there wasn't a Beat the Cold I'm not sure where people would go to for general energy saving advice...there's lots of people that need advice, so, the more support they have out there, the better (S42)



Case Study

Participant 1 – Roxy

Background and context

Roxy, aged 59, previously worked full-time in the care profession, providing domiciliary support. She had to take retirement due to a combination of family responsibilities and the deterioration of her own health conditions, due to suffering with carpal tunnel syndrome and IBS. These challenges intensified when she experienced a series of profound personal losses, her father passed away, and shortly after, her husband was diagnosed with anal cancer just over a year into their marriage.

Her husband's illness placed significant emotional and physical strain on Roxy, particularly as she became his full-time carer. The home's heating needed to be kept on 24/7 due to his condition and the washing machine was in constant use, drastically increasing energy consumption.

Despite explaining this to her energy supplier, her pleas for understanding were dismissed, and her monthly payments were increased from £122 to £179. Following her husband's passing in February 2025, she was left with only £600 a month to live on. With no life insurance or pension support, this financial strain became unsustainable.

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

Through support from Dougie Mac Hospice, Roxy was referred to Beat the Cold in April 2025. The team contacted her almost immediately to schedule a home visit.

they came either the following day, or the day after. There was a very short period in between Dougie Mac contacting them and the [Beat the Cold] coming in (P1)

Two women from the team visited Roxy at home and their kindness, professionalism, and empathy were deeply valued: *"they didn't feel like strangers in my home...you just felt as though you had got a friend in your home, rather than a stranger" (P1).*

Support received

Beat the Cold intervened directly with the energy company: *"We managed to switch her tariff to a new tariff, which saved her money" (S43)* and helped to reduce her monthly payments by around £40, something she had been unable to achieve herself, despite explaining that the increase in energy use was temporary. This enabled Roxy to have *"an affordable payment plan going forward" (S43).*

even though I explained to [energy provider] that it wouldn't be like that in the future and I...would have made the money up they just wouldn't listen to me at...there was no leeway with them...but they did when the Team spoke to them (P1)

Beat the Cold also followed up on a missing £150 Government Energy Support payment, although unfortunately this funding was never recovered, possibly due to Roxy losing email records during an overwhelming and emotional time.

As part of the support visit, Roxy was given practical energy-saving advice, such as using the washing machine during off-peak times and switching lights off when not in use. Roxy was given advice on food banks and some food places where discounted prices were available. The use of smart meters was discussed with Roxy *"but she couldn't have smart meters due to where the meters were fitted" (S43).*

Impact of support

The main difference Beat the Cold made was getting the energy company to finally listen and respond. The financial relief, though modest, made a meaningful difference to her ability to cope.

Roxy had already implemented the recommended energy-saving habits, saying that it was *"what I was doing sort of anyway. I was quite switched on for that. You know, I've always been careful and so I got all those things in place" (P1).*

it gave her some peace of mind and some control...she knew she was on this new tariff, the debt wasn't building up, she's got an affordable payment plan, so she should get that debt paid off pretty quickly (S43)



Participant reflections and recommendations

Roxy had never previously used fuel poverty support services and was unaware of the Keep Warm Team until Dougie Mac made the referral. She strongly believes such services need more publicity: *"People aren't aware, I don't think... I wasn't aware they were there until I spoke to Dougie Mac" (P1).*

Roxy wholeheartedly recommends the service to others in similar circumstances saying the service *"was invaluable to me and you know I can only imagine them being invaluable to other people as well"*. Roxy expressed willingness to support efforts that raise awareness and maintain funding:

if it helps to keep the funding going then I would do everything that I can really to make sure people know what they do, because not everybody knows and it's not publicised as much as it should be, you know people aren't aware (P1)



Case study

Participant 10- Glenda

Background and context

Glenda is a 56-year-old woman, living with multiple long-term health conditions, including Type 2 diabetes (insulin dependent), stage 4 chronic kidney disease, and registered blindness. Though Glenda retains some tunnel vision, her condition is deteriorating, and she is preparing for eventual total vision loss. Glenda is under regular hospital care and is currently not in work due to the impact of her health and a serious accident in 2023 caused by a sudden drop in blood pressure.

Following the accident and loss of income, despite being in receipt of Universal Credit, Glenda's energy bills became unmanageable, especially during the colder months, resulting in her savings being diminished, creating high levels of stress and affecting her ability to recover.

With not working and just being on statutory sick pay, it's a huge drop in what you get...[and] I'd gone through my savings (P10)

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

Glenda was referred to Beat the Cold through North Staffordshire Carers in January 2025, after her care team recognised she was struggling with energy bills. Though initially unfamiliar with welfare support systems due to a lifelong career in work, she was supported by carers, the local council, occupational therapists, and Citizens Advice to access services like Beat the Cold:



Initially it was getting over the shock of the accident and how I've lost my independence completely...I didn't know any of it [the support] was available to me... it was through all these different people [I got the help] (P10)

Support received

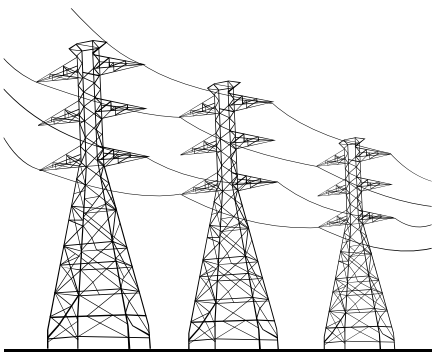
Beat the Cold provided Glenda with a £200 fuel voucher, which helped pay off debt, energy efficiency advice around maintaining constant low-level heating, closing unused rooms to retain warmth and using throws rather than increasing the boiler temperature. Glenda was also provided with practical items, such as radiator reflector panels to reduce heat loss and advice on, which she found simple but impactful: *"Just those little things...I've never consciously thought about that before" (P10).*

In addition, Beat the Cold sent Glenda information on treating damp, links to apply for a reduction in her water bill, and a referral to Staffordshire Community Foundation and the fire service for smoke alarms to be installed: *“we sent through some information about safe ways to treat the damp naturally and with ventilation”* (S43). As someone living with blindness, Glenda reflected that:

the best thing is that how quickly everything was turned around...[and] the advice was easy to understand (P10)

Impact of support

The support helped improve her mental well-being by reducing stress at a vulnerable time. It also empowered her to educate her family, passing energy-saving tips to her daughter, and improved her awareness of energy efficiency:



It's helped me pay for what I was already using, but also it gave me a little bit of peace of mind...and so that I think gave me just a little bit more of the stress free to help me with my recovery (P10)

Participant reflections and recommendations

Glenda suggested one key area where services like Beat the Cold could go further was helping consumers understand which energy tariffs are best suited to their needs:

I think it would be really good to understand what the best tariff is and what's out there...that's the biggest minefield (P10)

Glenda would recommend Beat the Cold to others in similar circumstances based on her experience of the support she received.

Summary

Glenda faced severe financial strain following a serious accident and reduced income. Through Beat the Cold she received a fuel voucher, energy-saving advice, and practical items to help manage her heating needs. The support eased her financial stress, improved her well-being, and empowered her with new knowledge. Glenda found the advice accessible and effective and recommends the service to others, though she noted the need for more guidance on choosing suitable energy tariffs.





Case Study

Participant 12- Jane

Background and context

This case study highlights a multi-generational household facing high energy use due to complex care needs. The home includes a grandfather (aged 82), with numerous health issues, including cancer, spinal problems and diabetes requiring four visits a day from carers, a grandmother, a working-age adult (Jane), and her young child under two. Jane works from home four days a week while simultaneously caring for both her grandfather and her child.

The grandfather's condition requires multiple electrical aids running daily, including an electric hospital bed and a stairlift, constant heating in cold months and frequent laundry (due to his care needs and the toddler).

As a result, the family's electricity usage is extremely high and they face unsustainable energy bills:

we spend an extortionate amount on electric every month (P12)

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

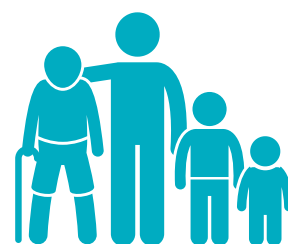
The family was referred to Beat the Cold in April 2025 through a social prescriber from their doctor's surgery due to the vulnerability of the grandfather and the financial pressure of high utility bills. Beat the Cold provided support and advice by phone: *"We raised concerns because we have constantly got to have the heating on when it is cold" (P12).*

Support received

Beat the Cold provided £200 support for energy bills, energy-saving advice, guidance on efficient heating and a referral to Severn Trent Water for further financial assistance.

The household had already implemented many of the suggested energy-saving measures, such as cavity wall insulation, double glazing, efficient heating controls and the support acted more as reassurance than new learning.

Somebody did ring me and give us advice like about putting things behind your radiator, keeping the door closed, draft excluders, it was basically like to try and improve your energy. But when we were speaking, they were things that we were doing. So, it was just good to speak to someone and know that the things that we were doing, we couldn't be doing any more to keep the cost of our energy low (P12)



Beat the Cold also arranged a referral to Staffordshire Community Foundation for additional support and a link to apply for a reduction in their water bill.

Impact of support

Jane reported two key outcomes. The £200 contribution to their energy debt provided financial relief especially for electricity, which is in constant use and the energy saving advice gave them peace of mind. Jane appreciated confirmation that the family were already doing everything possible to stay energy efficient, which was mentally and emotionally reassuring.

We try and do all we can to keep it down, but because of the situation that we are in, we can't do any different and obviously that money... really helped us to put a dent in obviously the debit that we have got every month in gas and electric (P12)

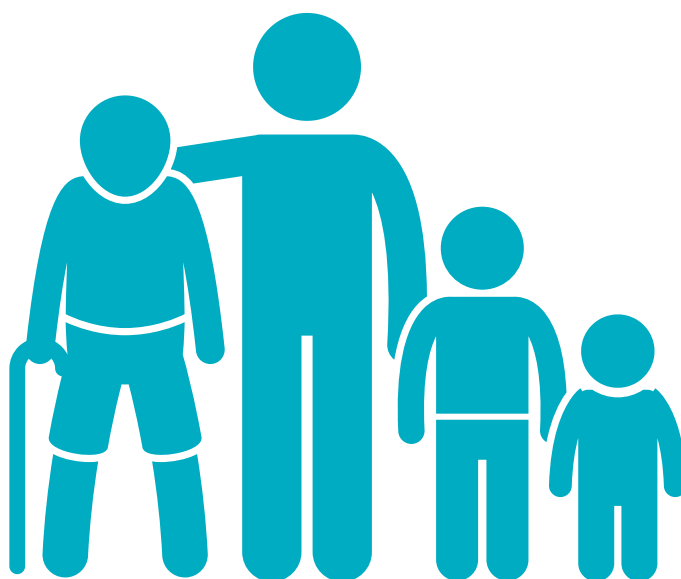
Participant reflections and recommendations

The process of accessing Beat the Cold was described by Jane as being “*nice and smooth and easy*” and the Beat the Cold staff were understanding and friendly: “*it was brilliant, it was dead easy, which is what we need, we have got enough stress going on without anything else being difficult*” (P12). had already recommended Beat the Cold to others.

Jane commented that she has already shared information about Beat the Cold with colleagues and friends and would recommend it without hesitation.

Summary

Jane lives in a multi-generational home with high energy demands due to her grandfather's complex care needs and a young child. Referred by a social prescriber, the family received monetary vouchers for energy support and advice from Beat the Cold. While they were already energy efficient, the support gave financial relief and emotional reassurance. Jane described the process as smooth and helpful, and has recommended the service to others.





Case Study

Participant 23 – Henry

Background and health context

Henry is a 36-year-old male who recently left employment due to mental health challenges. He lives alone as a tenant in a housing association one-bedroom flat and is currently reliant on Universal Credit. Henry shared that his general health is poor, largely due to ongoing struggles with his mental wellbeing. Henry's flat is equipped with storage heaters, and his initial complaint was that his heaters were not working and he was unable to access sufficient hot water.

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

Henry was referred to Beat the Cold by the mental health charity MIND. He was first contacted by Beat the Cold by a phone call in May 2024 followed by a representative visiting his home a week later. Henry was offered financial and practical support, with two further home visits and various other phone calls to support Henry.

Support received

Henry had newly installed storage heaters but was unsure how to use them efficiently: *"nothing was ever explained to me when it was installed" (P23)*. During a home visit Beat the Cold staff supported in setting up the storage heaters correctly and demonstrated how to adjust settings to reduce consumption and improve efficiency: *"they showed me how to set them up so they were more cost-efficient than they were" (P23)*.

we explained how the storage heaters all worked, showed him how to use them, [supported to] set all the programmers and the timers for the hot water and...showed him how to read the electric meter and the in-house display in his App (S44)

Beat the Cold also contacted Henry's energy supplier to ensure he was on the correct Economy 7 tariff for storage heaters. Henry also received two electricity vouchers to put credit on his meter. Although Henry had got new storage heaters, he was still having issues with his hot water. Beat the Cold were able to show him how to adjust how he uses his taps to get better efficiency from his hot water supply by not fully opening them:

when he was putting his hot water on the taps, he was pulling the taps right open and...was losing all the hot water so the cold water was coming in and it was cooling the hot water cylinder down, but also...he was having to put cold in it (S44)



Impact of support

The fuel vouchers enabled the Henry to keep his lights on and preserve food during colder months. This prevented him from going without essential utilities and supported both his financial and mental health. The practical guidance on using his heating and water efficiently led to lower bills and improved living conditions. The relief of having energy support had a direct positive impact on his mental health.

When I first got in touch with [Beat the Cold] I didn't have any heating at all...if I didn't have the vouchers, I would be sitting in the dark right now... [and] sitting in the dark with all your food going off just makes it [mental health] ten times worse (P23)

Participant reflections and recommendations

The process of redeeming the electricity vouchers at local retailers was described as overly complex and confusing. Henry had to scan multiple codes in a specific sequence, leading to multiple failed attempts and miscommunication with shop staff.

Misunderstandings and lack of training among shop workers created further barriers. In one instance, Henry felt he was being accused of trying to misuse the voucher.

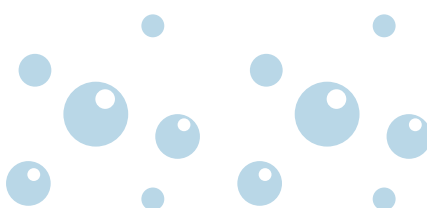
It's like a three-step verification...the first time I ever did that, I didn't know what was going on. The guy at the petrol station didn't know what was going on...when it didn't work, I think he was very suspicious like I was trying to steal it! (P23)

Henry suggested that streamlining the process or providing clearer guidance for both users and shop staff for redeeming energy vouchers could improve the experience and avoid embarrassment. In addition, as Henry initially had no heating he reflected that the provision of a small portable radiator might have helped short-term.

Henry expressed high satisfaction with Beat the Cold's support, highlighting the receipt of the energy vouchers as being the most impactful. He confirmed that he would recommend the service to others in similar situations.

Summary

This case illustrates the real-world impact of targeted energy assistance for individuals in vulnerable housing and financial situations. Beat the Cold played a critical role in preventing energy poverty for a vulnerable individual with mental health issues. Henry's experience underscores the value of face-to-face guidance and ongoing support, particularly for those struggling with mental ill health. Direct financial support combined with practical, in-person advice led to improved wellbeing and energy efficiency. While the voucher redemption system posed initial challenges, Henry adapted and successfully used the support provided.





Case Study

Participant 31 – Mark and Rachel

Background and context

Mark and his wife Rachel were a newly married couple in their 50s, both working full-time. They were financially stable and saving to fix their home heating. In May 2024, everything changed: Mark suffered a massive stroke, resulting in a brain bleed and long-term physical disability. He was hospitalised for three and a half months and now requires 24-hour care and is confined to a wheelchair and hospital bed in the living room. The couple live in a property with prepayment gas and electricity meters.

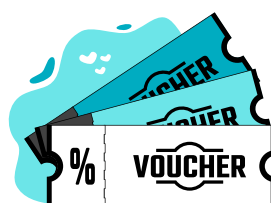
Within days of the medical event, their household income stopped and they are now in receipt of Universal Credit and PIP. Rachel, who has fibromyalgia, struggled both physically and emotionally. Their savings were used for daily living, and they had to max out on credit cards to stay afloat during the six to seven-month wait for any benefits.

we're just living hand to mouth to try and pay back as much as the debt as we can (P31)

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

Initially unfamiliar with the benefits system, Rachel sought help from a local food bank, the job centre and Citizens Advice, which led to a referral to Beat the Cold by the Stroke Association. This was shortly followed by an initial telephone call from Beat the Cold. She describes that point in her life as a crisis:

I do believe in my heart that Beat the Cold probably saved my life twice over the past year (P31)



Support received

At the time of contact, no fuel vouchers were available but Beat the Cold signposted Rachel to other services including the Fuel Bank Foundation and Citizens Advice for potential emergency support.

we didn't have any fuel vouchers at the time so I... gave him some links for other organisations that they could go to get help (S42)

Consequently, Rachel reported receiving numerous vouchers for their gas and electric costs, in addition to £75 food vouchers from Beat the Cold. Beat the Cold also made a three-way call with their energy supplier resulting in delivery of a heater, as they had no central heating.

Rachel and Mark were referred for a replacement boiler and home insulation, but unfortunately did not end up being eligible for the schemes. They were also referred to the Priority Services Register and were provided information about the Big Difference Scheme for water bill reductions.

They didn't know about the big difference scheme, so I explained that and I sent them links by email as well so that they can apply for that. It's a very simple form online and I put his details on the priority services register (S42)

Rachel recalls receiving immediate, supportive, compassionate, and ongoing support. With no local family to depend on, Rachel described Beat the Cold as “*sharing the burden*” at a time when she needed it the most, particularly with contacting the energy supplier:

They just took all that load from me and said leave it with me...and a couple of days later, we had solutions...support [from Beat the Cold] was amazing and they just gave me the time and spoke with me with compassion, care, professionalism...I just felt like I wasn't in this on my own (P31)

Impact of the support

The emotional and practical impact of Beat the Cold's help was profound. Rachel found emotional support during a time of extreme isolation and anxiety. The energy and food vouchers helped them through winter, when their broken radiators downstairs left parts of their home unheated.

We're getting there...slowly paying off debt. But without their help, I don't know where I'd be (P31)

Participant reflections and recommendations

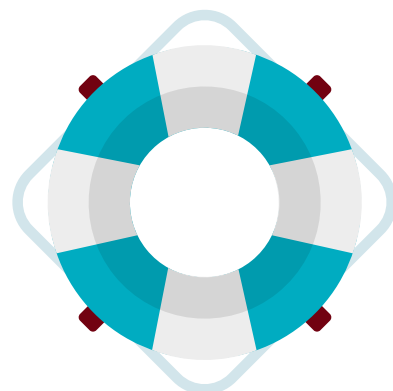
Rachel was deeply moved by the compassion and consistency shown by the Beat the Cold team.

She praised the staff for their empathy and professionalism referring to them as “*absolute angels*” and has already recommended Beat the Cold to others in crisis, including a friend now receiving similar support:

Rachel's only recommendation was a desire for Beat the Cold to have more influence or follow-through with energy suppliers on delayed grant schemes, such as those for replacement boilers.

Summary

This case highlights how Beat the Cold is far more than an energy support charity, it is a lifeline for individuals facing sudden crisis. Through a mix of practical help, persistent advocacy, and personal care, they empowered Rachel to keep going at the most challenging point in her life.





Case Study

Participant 37 – Kate

Background and health context

Kate is a single 59-year-old female living in a ground floor flat. She is currently unable to work due to having poor mental health, ADHD, osteoarthritis and poor mobility. Kate receives Universal Credit and has an annual income of less than £10,000.

Referral and initial contact with Beat the Cold

Kate was referred to Beat the Cold by social prescriber, via her GP surgery, as she was encountering significant difficulties managing household energy bills. These issues began when a Direct Debit payment was taken at the wrong time by her energy supplier, leading to unmanageable debt accumulation.

Despite trying to switch to a pre-payment meter with the help of a social prescriber, the process proved extremely difficult.

The supplier failed to act on multiple occasions, and over several months, the Kate's energy debt increased. This situation was compounded by Kate's physical and mental challenges, making it incredibly stressful and overwhelming to navigate.

it was so erratic and everything, that it was just stressing her out. And the fuel company was promising her, oh, it will do this, we do that, we [will] do it on this date and it just wasn't happening (S44)

Kate was first contacted by Beat the Cold in July 2024 by phone and was supported by a further 18 phone calls and one home visit.

Even if they couldn't come and make an appointment with me, they would add me to the calls that they were making to [energy provider], so that I was in the loop with everything that was going on. They were excellent (P37)

Support from Beat the Cold

Beat the Cold liaised directly with Kate's energy supplier, relieving her of the stress and frustration of repeated phone calls. They successfully supported her in switching to a pre-payment meter, which enabled Kate to manage her energy costs more effectively, keep warmer and significantly reduced the mental strain she had been experiencing.



back and forth on the phone to [energy provider] was an absolutely nightmare, so they kind of saved my sanity, because they did it all for me... everything has been sorted out now, my bills are back to normal, and I am managing to pay it with help from Beat the Cold (P37)

As well as providing general energy advice, Kate was also provided with energy vouchers which were added to her energy account to reduce her debt and Beat the Cold managed to reduce her debt payments to £1 a week. Beat the Cold also placed Zoe on the Priorities register: *"It has helped me mentally as well, because if I would have had to go through this all by myself, I don't know what I would have done" (P37).*

Impact of the support

Although the support did not affect Kate's physical health, it did relieve intense mental pressure. Kate expressed how having someone to speak to and act on their behalf made a critical difference to her wellbeing:

it's the mental aspect as well of knowing somebody is there, that if there's a problem you can call them. Because we are not all tech-savvy, so you know sometimes we just need a human being to speak to instead of a machine (P37)

With the new pre-payment meter, Kate gained insight into how much energy she was using and when it was most cost-effective to use it: *"I can now monitor how much electricity I'm using...I've saved £20 a month" (P37).* This has helped reduce her emotional stress as she can *"now afford food, now the energy bill has been reduced and debt cleared" (P37).*

Participant reflections

When asked what stood out most about the programme, Kate emphasised the human support and empathy shown by the Beat the Cold team:



the team are really helpful and friendly, I think that makes a massive difference...when you feel that you can actually call somebody to help you and they help you, that is a massive reassurance (P37)

Kate also expressed 100% willingness to recommend Beat the Cold to others in similar situations and had in fact already done so.

they were absolutely brilliant, absolutely brilliant, I couldn't have done it without them... because this has gone on for over three years...it's made a massive difference – mentally and financially (P37)

Summary

This case demonstrates how personalised, consistent, and practical support from Beat the Cold can transform a client's ability to manage energy debt and improve quality of life. Through direct advocacy with energy providers, and financial support, Beat the Cold enabled Kate to regain control, comfort, and peace of mind.

Overall summary of case studies

These six case studies collectively demonstrate the profound and wide-ranging impact of Beat the Cold's personalised, persistent, and practical support for individuals experiencing energy hardship.

Across diverse situations, including mental health challenges, caring responsibilities, sudden crises, and complex household needs, Beat the Cold consistently acted as a vital lifeline.

Through direct advocacy with energy providers, financial assistance, and in-person guidance, participants were supported to regain control, improve their wellbeing, and stay warm in difficult times.

Participants valued not just the material support, but the emotional reassurance and dignity that came with it.



4. Summary and recommendations

4.1 Summary

The Keep Warm, Keep Well intervention funded by the Energy Redress Scheme, aimed to alleviate fuel poverty, reaching 948 households, with 406 receiving in-depth support. The evaluation involved routinely collected data from these households, a survey with 108 participants, interviews with 24 of them, and consultations with five stakeholders.

Findings revealed that participants considered Beat the Cold an essential service offering practical, financial, and emotional support, especially in hardship. Financial aid through energy vouchers, direct supplier payments, and energy debt assistance was crucial for meeting basic needs like heating and food.

The service's simplicity, speed, and accessibility were particularly beneficial for those with mental health challenges or limited digital skills. Participants appreciated the respectful and compassionate support, which promoted dignity and reduced feelings of shame and isolation.

The provision of information appeared to be more effective than financial support at improving the ability to keep warm, suggesting that clear, accessible guidance may play a particularly powerful role in supporting winter wellbeing.

4.2 Recommendations

- Work with partners to explain some of the challenges that Beat the Cold beneficiaries have experienced, e.g., fuel voucher issues.
- Work with with referral partners to ensure awareness of Beat the Cold services and support them to raise awareness among potential beneficiaries or to check their eligibility.
- Consider written guidance for Beat the Cold beneficiaries about when/if they would need to apply for further financial support.
- Consider developing the Beat the Cold database to expand routinely collected data and to incorporate linked data e.g., One Health records, energy usage, costs. See section 4.3 for detailed monitoring and evaluation recommendations.

4.3 Monitoring and evaluation recommendations

Framework for monitoring and evaluation

Following this evaluation of the services Beat the Cold provided for the KWKW intervention, some aspects have been identified that would further enhance Beat the Cold's ability to monitor and conduct further impact evaluations. These related specifically to the services Beat the Cold provided for KWKW and while some may be transferable, this evaluation has not considered anything outside of the scope of Beat the Cold's provision for KWKW.

Impact-driven data collection

A robust data collection strategy should underpin all aspects of Beat the Cold service delivery. This will enable Beat the Cold to demonstrate measurable outcomes and support them to adapt to possible new emerging needs and outcomes. Beat the Cold currently collect substantial data from beneficiaries (e.g., socio-demographic and household characteristics, type of services provided and their nominal potential monetary value).

Data collection is already standardised and collected from all beneficiaries receiving support supporting evaluation and monitoring. However, some moderation to the types of data collected and/or timing of data collection would support Beat the Cold to better understand the impact on beneficiaries. The priority for monitoring and evaluation will need to be considered alongside the feasibility accessing these data. Some recommendations are long-term aspirations while others could be considered in the short/medium term. The following table highlights some suggested changes based on KWKW objectives.

Objective	Example indicators	Example data sources	Comments
Impact on health services	Reduction in visits to primary care in past 12 months Quantify savings to the NHS	One Health and Care records Pathfinder data set (currently being establish by Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB)	Reliant on it being possible to integrate the Beat the Cold CRM dataset with “One Health and Care” or Pathfinder A DIPA to access to relevant healthcare data might be more feasible Nominal estimates of service value being identified
Changes to health	Changes to psychological wellbeing Changes to Physical wellbeing Quality Adjusted Life Years	Participant survey’s using established measures (e.g. SF1, S-WEMWEBS, EQ-5D), census questions on general health, long-term limiting conditions	Pre and post measures suggested. Measures taken at first support contact with Beat the Cold and 2-4 weeks following final contact
Energy savings	Changes to beneficiary energy usage CO2 savings	Energy bills EPC comparisons	Pre and post measures suggested. Measures taken at first support contact with Beat the Cold and 6-12 months following final contact

Continued....

....continued

Objective	Example indicators	Example data sources	Comments
Financial savings	Changes to beneficiary energy costs Fuel poverty	Energy bills Survey question at baseline and follow-up	Pre and post measures suggested. Measures taken at first support contact with Beat the Cold and 6-12 months following final contact
Benefit-cost Ratio (BCR)	Overall return on investment, including financial, carbon, and health outcomes	Total benefits (£) ÷ total cost (£), tracked per intervention type	Feasibility of this dependent on other factors

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