

OAPs in the money

More than £4 million has been added to the incomes of 2,500 Scottish pensioners who were previously unaware they were entitled to the money.

The Scottish Government invested almost £1 million in welfare rights projects to achieve the four-fold return – described by Housing and Communities Minister Alex Neil as ‘spectacular’.

The Older Person’s Advice Project (OPAP) and Older People’s Advice Service (OPAS) are operated by Linkwide, a subsidiary of the Link Group. They offer confidential advisers to help people who have health problems, are housebound, or who live in remote areas. Housing Minister Alex Neil addresses Link Group AGM

In one case a couple secured £34,600 in backdated pension payments. In another, a couple saw their weekly income jump by over £310.

It is estimated that as much as £5.4 billion of benefit remains unclaimed by older people in the UK each year.

Mr Neil said:

“These ground breaking projects have delivered spectacular results. As a direct result of Linkwide’s proactive approach, contacting older people directly and offering services in their own homes, many lives have been changed dramatically for the better.

“It is important in the current economic climate older people claim the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.

“Many older people do not realise that they are entitled to extra cash. That is why it is imperative we do all we can to put extra money in their pockets.”

“But it’s about more than the financial gain. These projects have improved an older person’s quality of life and importantly, lessened the feeling of isolation that many older people feel in their own home.

Nan McCabe from the Scottish Helpline for Older People said:

“The OPAS service offers huge benefits to older people across Scotland. The proactive and intensive support offered meets the specific needs of older vulnerable people who are unable to engage with traditionally delivered advocacy services.”

Link Group’s Chief Executive Craig Sanderson said:-“Our results show that we have made a real difference to the lives of many over 60s, who for reasons such as the complexity of the benefits system or the feeling that they are ‘getting by’, were previously not claiming their full entitlement.”

OPAP is funded by the Scottish Government, Falkirk Council, Coalfields Regeneration Trust and 6 partner Housing Associations. It operates across central Scotland.

OPAS, funded wholly by the Scottish Government, operates in North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and Clackmannashire Council with a focus on the regeneration areas.

The Link group of companies provides new and improved homes for rent and sale, community regeneration services and support and care for individuals.